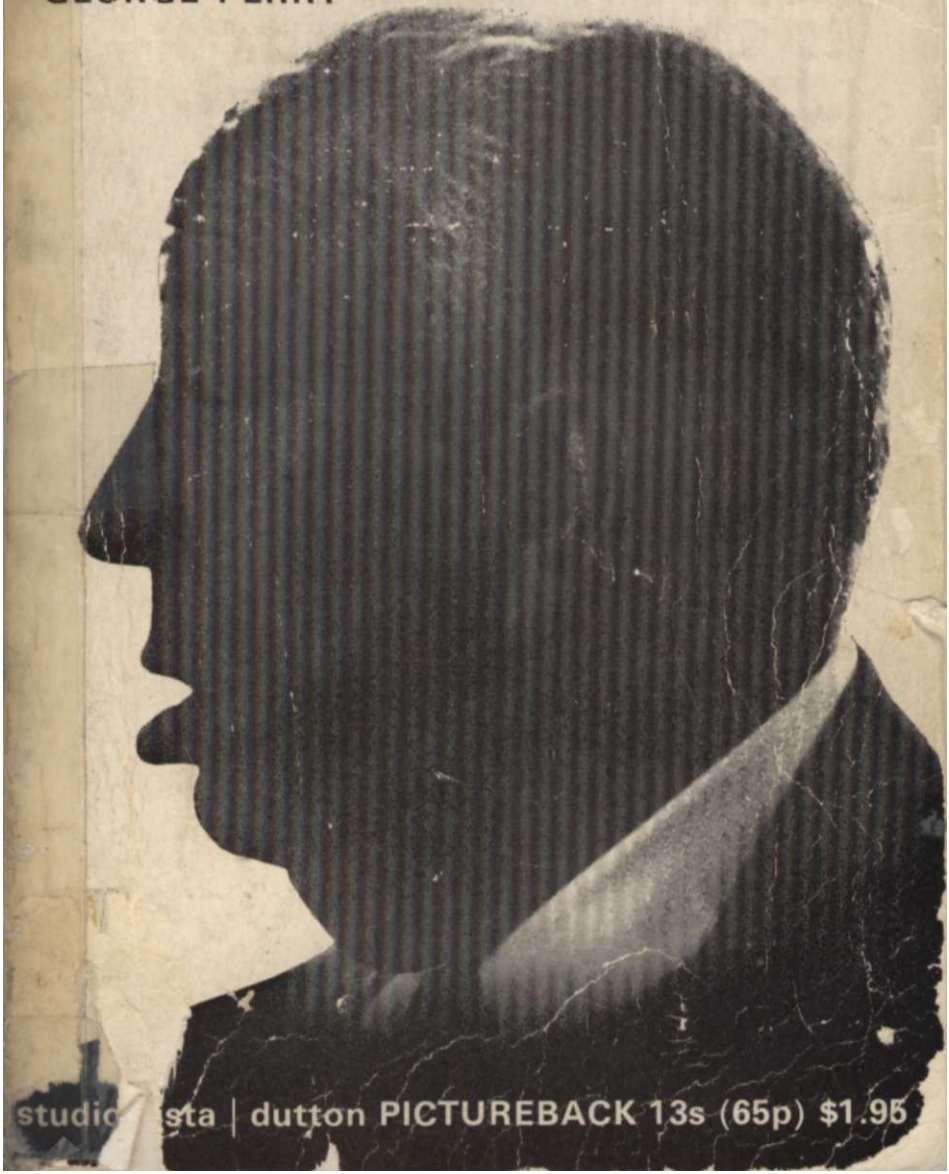
THE FILMS OF
Alfred Hitchcock

GEORGE PERRY



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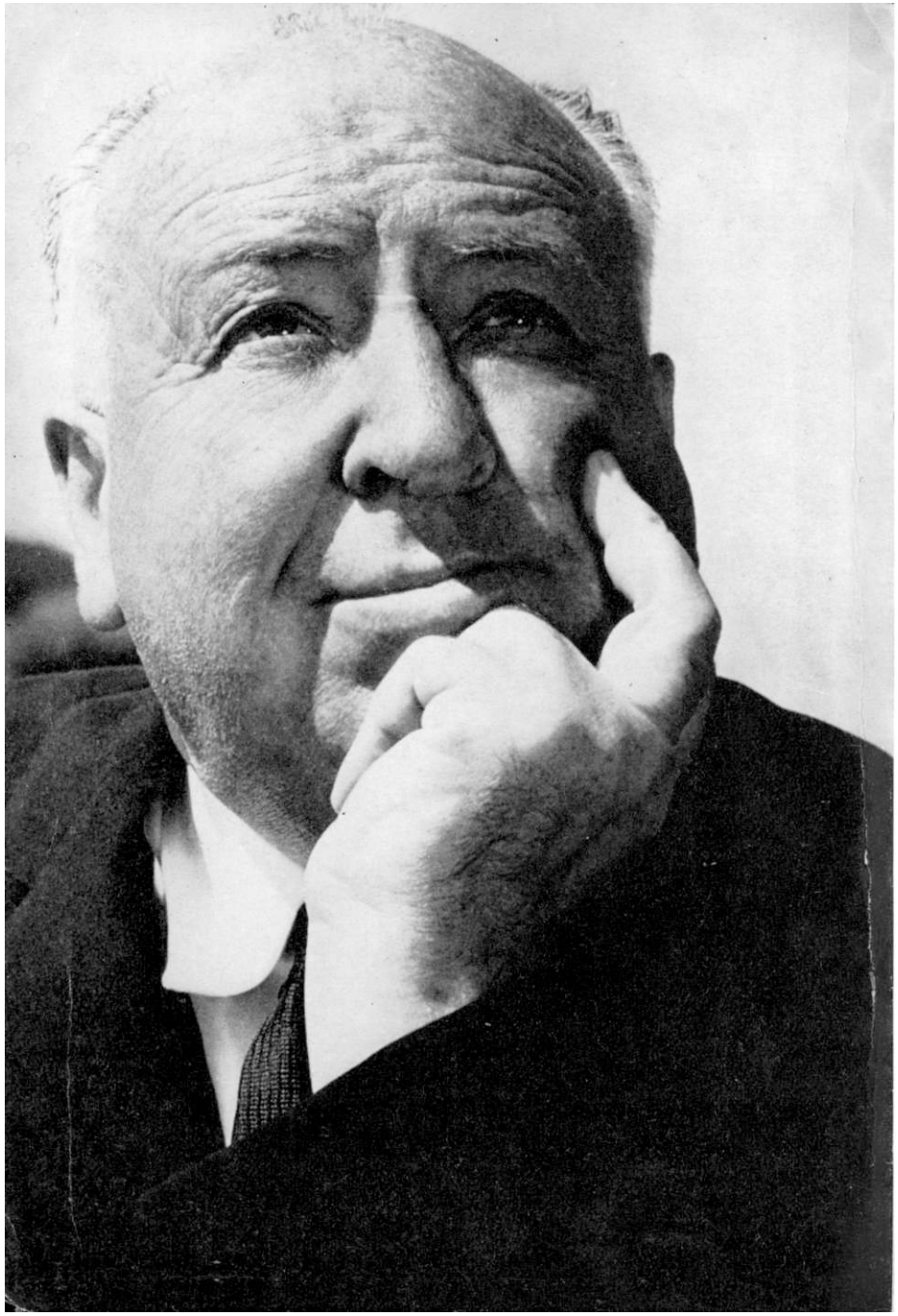

George Perry

The films of ALFRED HITCHCOCK

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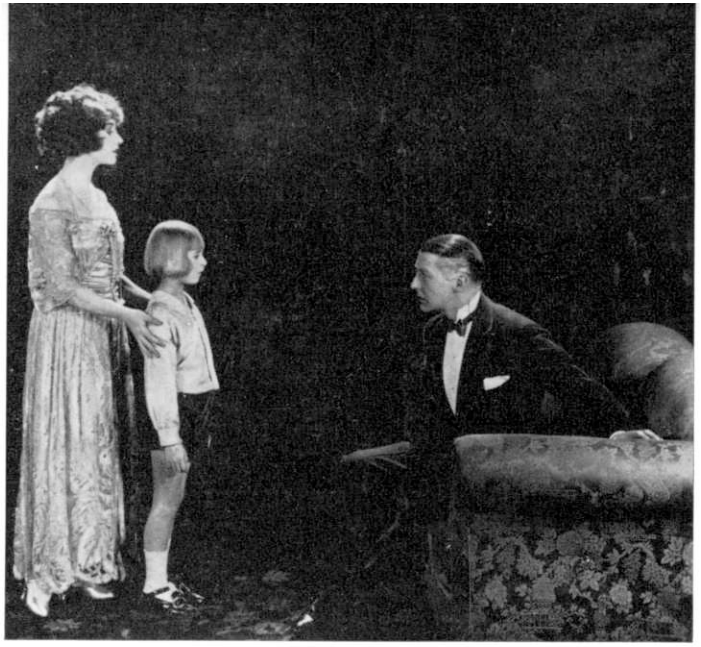


Betty Compson, Clive Brook in **Woman to Woman**

The silent period: 1921–9

Alfred Joseph Hitchcock's familiar rasping voice even now has the trace of an urban Essex accent after many years of California. He was born at Leytonstone, in the north-eastern suburbs of London, on August 13, 1899. His father was a poulterer and greengrocer. The first trade induced in the young Hitchcock a lifelong disgust for eggs—he never eats them and has been known to treat them savagely in his films. The second gave him a youthful taste for geography—he read labels on fruit-boxes and plotted the voyages they had taken to reach the shop. On his bedroom wall he kept a map of the world and charted ships' journeys with the aid of pin flags and *Lloyd's Register*. By the time he was ten he had travelled to the end of every route on the new red motor-buses of the London General.

His father was a Catholic and raised him strictly. At the age of five he was sent to the local police station with a note from his father to his friend, the station sergeant, who promptly locked him in a cell for a few minutes and said: 'That's what we do with naughty little boys!' Hitchcock's fear and distrust of the machinery of authority is usually attributed to this traumatic incident. He was

a quiet, solitary and well-behaved child. His schooldays were spent at St Ignatius' College, a Jesuit boarding-school in London. There he was instilled with a sense of religious fear and the power of physical punishment. His developing imagination underwent a strong reaction from the force of evil. The Jesuits, he claims, taught him discipline and self-control and gave him the ability to organise methodically.

On leaving school he at first trained to be an engineer and absorbed the intricate mysteries of mechanics. Then he changed direction and studied fine arts at London University. He acquired a taste for graphic design. His first paid job was with a small advertising department at fifteen shillings a week. From there he went to W. T. Henley, the cable company, as a layout man. His caricatures of senior staff members became celebrated in the house magazine. Hitchcock had by this time, at the age of twenty, become fascinated with films. He pestered the film company offices in Wardour Street in the hope of an opportunity to work in the studios. An acquaintance at Henley's introduced him to the title department of a production company and he started part-time work designing captions and titles. Later he joined the

Clive Brook (centre), Betty Compson in **The White Shadow**

Clive Brook, Lillian Hall-Davies in **The Passionate Adventure**

newly opened London office of Famous Players-Lasky as chief of the art title department. Through 1921 and 1922 he wrote and designed the title cards for nearly a dozen films. Undoubtedly this experience taught him a great deal about film construction.

It was during this period that he made a false start as a director. A publicity woman talked him into directing a comedy about London lowlife, called *Number Thirteen*. The actress Clare Greet, who appeared in it, also put up some of the money. Some way through production, money ran out and the project collapsed. The film was never finished, and Hitchcock went back to the title studio. But his next adventure was more promising. A Seymour Hicks play was being filmed at Islington when the director fell ill halfway through production. Hicks, at his wits' end and impressed by Hitchcock's enthusiasm, enlisted him as a co-director and they completed the film, *Always Tell Your Wife*, together.

His next assignment was as designer, assistant director and script collaborator (in 1922 there were no rigid demarcation lines between functions) on *Woman to Woman*, directed by Graham Cutts. Betty Compson was imported from Hollywood at the then astronomical salary of £1,000 per week and her co-star was Clive Brook, who got a Hollywood contract as a result of his performance. The same team made *The White Shadow* the following year. At this time Michael Balcon formed Gainsborough Pictures with Graham Cutts. Its headquarters were at Islington. The first production was *The Passionate Adventure* which Hitchcock wrote.

In 1925, during a British film recession, Balcon made an agreement with Erich Pommer, the head of UFA in Berlin, to shoot three films in Germany. The first, *The Blackguard* with Jane Novak and Walter Rilla, was filmed at Neubabelsberg. After another Islington film, *The Prude's Fall*, Graham Cutts felt that he could no longer work with Hitchcock. Balcon decided to make the thrusting young man a director in his own right. Faced with the distributors' distrust for new names, he felt it would be best if Hitchcock began his directorial career in Germany.

Early Hitchcock décor. Walter Rilla, Jane Novak in **The Blackguard**

The first film, *The Pleasure Garden*, was made in the Emelka Studios, Munich. Balcon signed two Hollywood stars, Virginia Valli and Carmelita Geraghty, in order to gain American distribution. Eliot Stannard's screenplay, adapted from a novel, was hardly inspired. It was about two chorus girls at the Pleasure Garden Theatre, one good, the other bad. A melodramatic sequence occurs in the tropics, with good girl nursing good man through fever. Baron Ventimiglia's location photography of a Lake Como honeymoon enthralled the critics, most of whom discerned that even though the piece was slight, a talented new director had arrived. Said the *Daily Express*: 'His work is of a uniformly high quality; there are times when it is great, times when the onlooker says to himself "That is perfect."'

One of the smaller parts in *The Pleasure Garden* was played by the Hollywood actress Nita Naldi, and she stayed to take the lead in his second picture, *The Mountain Eagle*. This, too, was made at Emelka, and on location in the Austrian Tyrol, which had to stand-in for the mountains of Kentucky. As before, the story by

Opposite: White man's burden; John Stuart, stricken with fever, is nursed by Virginia Valli in **The Pleasure Garden**

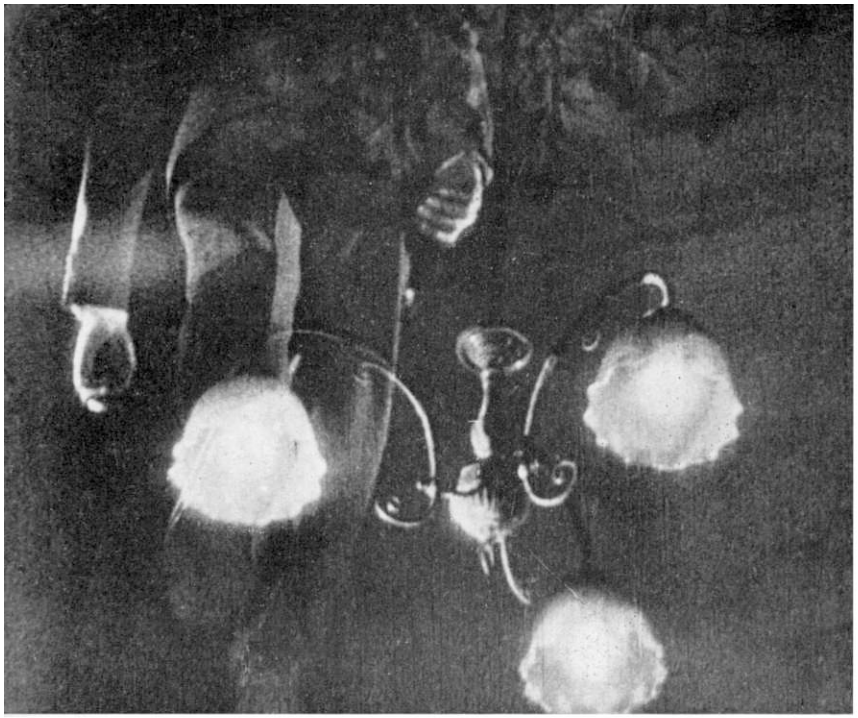
The chorus at **The Pleasure Garden**

Hitchcock directing **The Mountain Eagle** at Emelka Studios, Munich

Opposite: Hitchcock at twenty-seven

Eliot Stannard was not of Hitchcock's choosing. It was about a village feud in which a virtuous schoolteacher is driven out as a wanton and rescued by a mysterious stranger from the mountains called Fearogod. In spite of an indifferent scenario, the film was successful. It was also the last of the trio of pictures Michael Balcon produced in Germany, although he continued an association with Pommer and UFA well into the thirties.

Hitchcock's next film was the first in the *genre* which he was to make his special province—the suspense-thriller. It was *The Lodger,* from an excellent novel by Mrs Belloc-Lowndes on the Jack the Ripper theme. From its brilliant opening, including a sequence of a man's hand on a banister gliding slowly down flight after flight of stairs, its owner eventually vanishing through the



The ceiling effect in **The Lodger**

door into the night, followed by a shot of a newsbill announcing that another girl has been murdered—the film showed an exciting boldness and confidence quite uncharacteristic of the British cinema of the time. Ivor Novello was cast as the mysterious young man who becomes the suspect. He was Britain's leading matinée idol. Hitchcock wanted him to be the murderer, as in the book, but commercial interests insisted that his innocence be asserted in the end. (The same problem was to crop up fifteen years later with Cary Grant in *Suspicion*.)

Ivor Montagu, *The Observer*'s first film critic and at that time working in conjunction with Adrian Brunel, a pioneer of British production, was asked to edit the film. He also wrote the titles, with surprising economy—there are only about eighty in the film. Most silent films ran them into the hundreds. Montagu con-

Ivor Novello in **Downhill**

tinued his association with Hitchcock with the next two pictures and later, in the thirties. The distributors were not impressed when *The Lodger* was previewed. They felt that it was too Germanic in inspiration, too heavy in execution. For several weeks they hesitated. Finally, it was shown to the trade and was a tremendous success, both with the critics and later with the public. Hitchcock's reputation was established with his first important film. It was a young man's picture. Its creator was only twenty-six. In retrospect it has a hint of precocity, of conceptual and technical extravagance: the suspect manacled to a railing in the attitude of the crucified Christ, for instance. The famous transparent ceiling, revealing the perturbed Novello pacing his floor above, was another indulgent effect. It was achieved with the aid of a sheet of inch-thick plate glass.

When *The Lodger* was completed, Hitchcock married. His bride was Alma Reville, whom he had known since his first days at Famous Players-Lasky, where she had been a writer. He had proposed on a voyage back from Germany during the making of *The Blackguard*. With characteristic caution, it was nearly two years before the marriage took place—at Brompton Oratory on December 2, 1926. It has now lasted nearly forty years. Alma Reville has worked on scripts of many of her husband's films. In 1929 she bore him a daughter, Patricia, their only child, who had a short acting career before her own marriage.

Opposite: Newspaper office in **The Lodger**. Shadowy foreground figure is Hitchcock making his first 'personal appearance'

Hitchcock and his fiancée, Alma Reville, on the day before their wedding

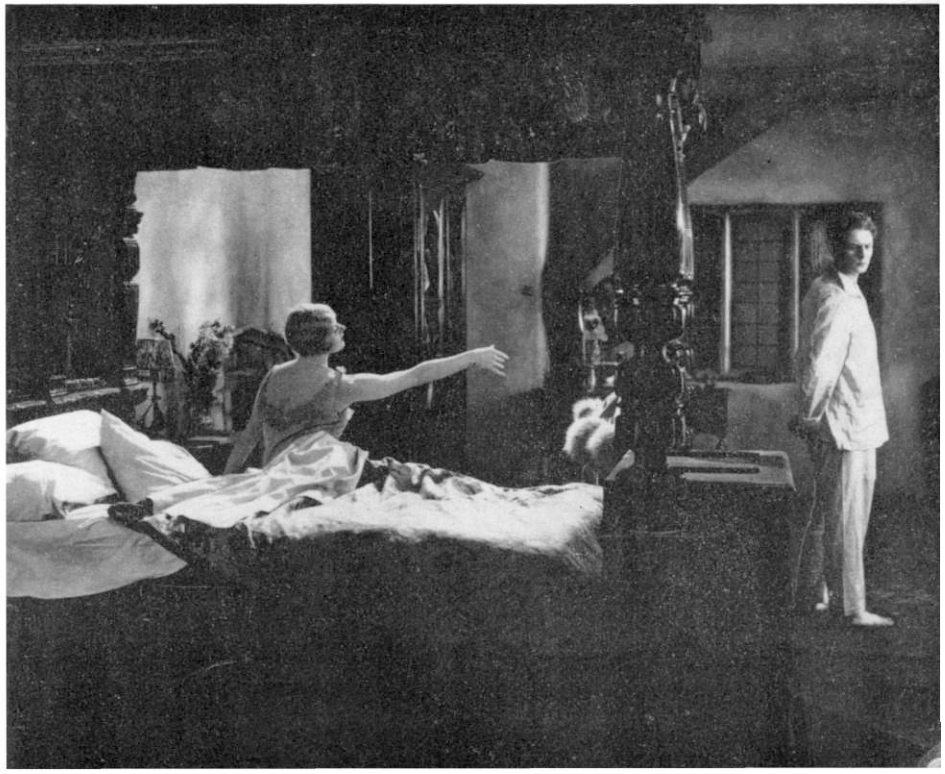
Isabel Jeans with Hannah Jones in **Downhill**

After *The Lodger* Hitchcock received three American offers but he turned them down, preferring to stay at Islington with Michael Balcon. Following the triumph of *The Lodger*, his next film was an acute disappointment. It was *Downhill*, the story of a public schoolboy who is expelled after shielding a friend. Thrown out by his father, he drifts away and after various adventures marries a worthless actress who, with the aid of a lover, removes his money. Eventually, his health broken, he is restored to virtue and the bosom of his contrite family. Ivor Novello played the lead, but not surprisingly, in view of the novelettish plot, he failed to achieve the same personal success that he had gained in *The Lodger*.

Balcon recalls in his memoirs the words of the schoolboy on being expelled: 'Does that mean, sir, that I shall not be able to play for the Old Boys?' The trade, sensing a way to sell a bad picture, suggested that the angle to use was the name of Hitchcock.

His next film was no happier. It was *Easy Virtue*, from the Noël Coward play, adapted by Eliot Stannard who had worked on the scripts of all Hitchcock's films up to that date. Noël Coward, whose potency resides in his dialogue rather than his situations, did not transfer well to the silent screen. The play was a mockery of social attitudes—the misfortune of a divorcee who remarries without revealing her past. The film part was played touchingly by Isabel Jeans, who had been the cheating actress in *Downhill*. Both films had been tossed to Hitchcock to direct, regardless of their suitability. It was this treatment which precipitated a change of studio, and in mid-1927, after *Easy Virtue* was finished, he left Islington and Gainsborough and joined British International Pictures at Elstree. At twenty-eight he was Britain's most promising director and earning the unprecedented salary of £10,000, rising in three years to £15,000.

Isabel Jeans and Robin Irvine in **Easy Virtue**



Fight scene in **The Ring**

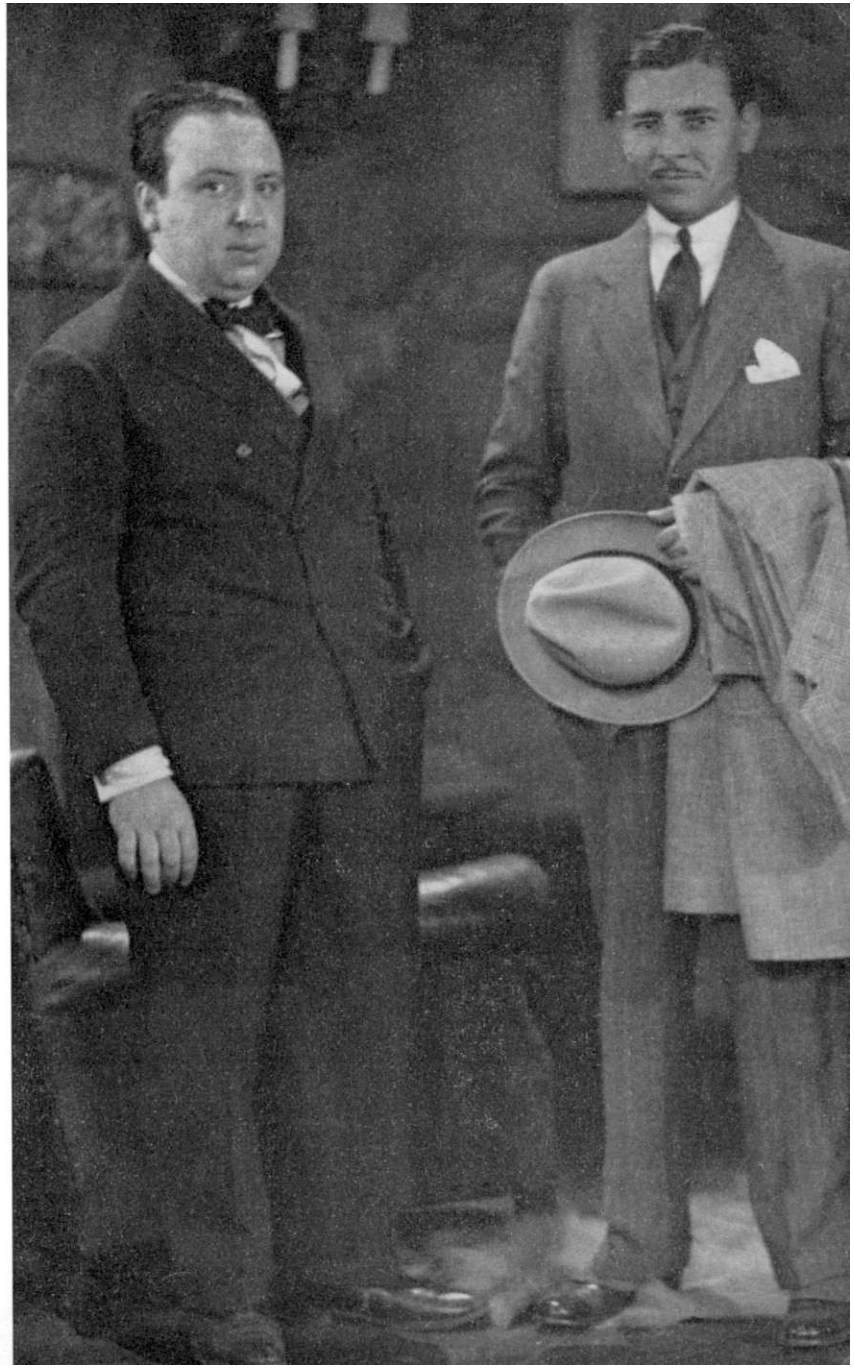
The first film for B.I.P. was *The Ring*, an original story by Hitchcock himself. His inspiration came from the boxing world—the gaudy fairground booths at the bottom of the scale, the immaculately dinner-suited spectators at the Albert Hall at the top. Carl Brisson played a young fighter who marries the boxing-booth cashier, becomes successful and then sees his rival, the Champion, make off with his wife. They fight in the ring at the Albert Hall, and when he appears to be losing the girl returns to his side and gives him the will to win. The title refers not only to the boxing ring but to the bracelet the Champion gives the girl. It becomes an adultery symbol, fashioned in the form of a serpent—a reminder of the original sin. As in *The Lodger*, there were some well-handled visual effects—the rival's face appearing on the hero's punchball, the champagne bubbles going flat when he realises that his wife has been unfaithful. It was the best of Hitchcock's silent films after *The Lodger*.

Gordon Harker, Carl Brisson and Harry Terry on the fairground booth

It seemed at this stage of his career he was doomed to make two indifferent films for each good one. The next subject was his own adaptation of Eden Philpotts' comic study of bucolic courtship, *The Farmer's Wife*. The tedious rebuffs of the middle-aged widower attempting to select a wife from the district's marriageable females, yet overlooking to the last the charms of his faithful housekeeper, were poor material for Hitchcock. Some pleasant photography of the English countryside by Jack Cox and a subtle impression of rural life rescued the picture from complete failure and demonstrated that Alfred Hitchcock at that time could make a bad film better than any other British director.

Opposite: Ronald Colman meets Hitchcock when he visits Elstree in March 1928

Lillian Hall-Davies and Jameson Thomas in **The Farmer's Wife**



Describing the next film he made, he himself has used the word 'dreadful'. Hitchcock's original idea had been to make a film about a girl working in the cellars at Reims who wonders what happens to the champagne after it is shipped. She would have gravitated to the city, become a prostitute, returned beaten to her old job and every time a shipment left would have thought, 'That's going to cause trouble for somebody!' The front office rejected the story. Instead, Eliot Stannard's screenplay was about a champagne millionaire's daughter who is tricked into believing that he has lost his money. She gets a job in a night-club, selling the champagne. Thinking the joke has gone far enough, the father tries to rescue her, but she refuses to be extricated from her situation until she is allowed to marry the man he objected to formerly. Hitchcock despised *Champagne*.

Betty Balfour being appraised in **Champagne**

Anny Ondra—'prototype . . . of famous Hitchcock blondes'

The subject that followed was again romantic in tone. Eliot Stannard had now adapted Hall Caine's triangle novel *The Manxman*; it was assigned to Hitchcock. In it two men, one a fisherman, the other a law student, are in love with the same girl in their Isle of Man village. When the first goes away and is reported drowned, she falls in love and has an affair with the second. Then her first love returns, suspecting nothing, and marries her. The child she bears is not his and unable to keep the deception going she tries to drown herself. She is charged with attempted suicide (this British notion appals Hitchcock's French critics) and brought before her former lover, who is now a judge. Her father, aware of the truth, denounces him, and he finally throws up his career to go off with the woman he loves and the child.

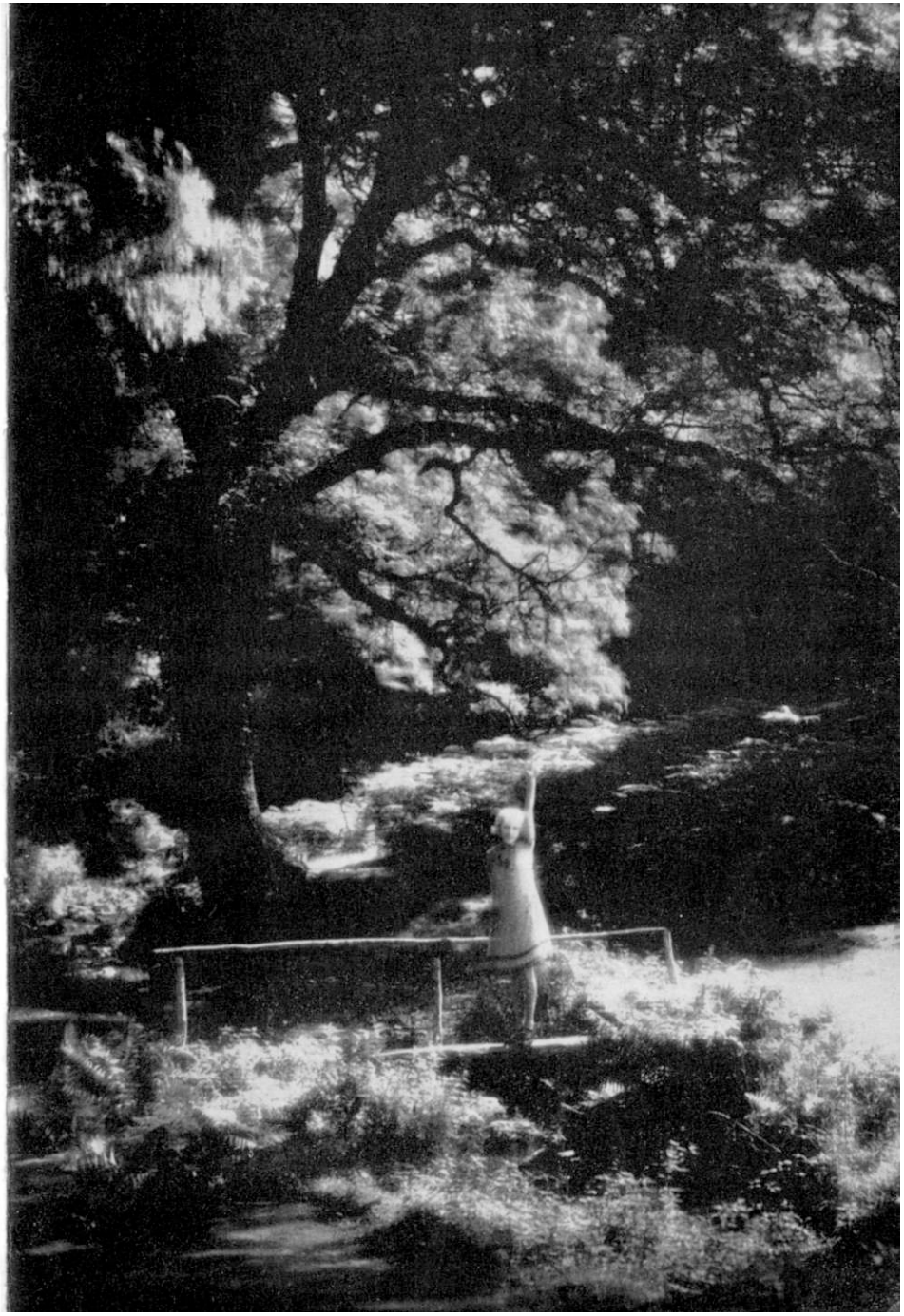
The Manxman—carefully composed images

Opposite: Anny Ondra, from **The Manxman**

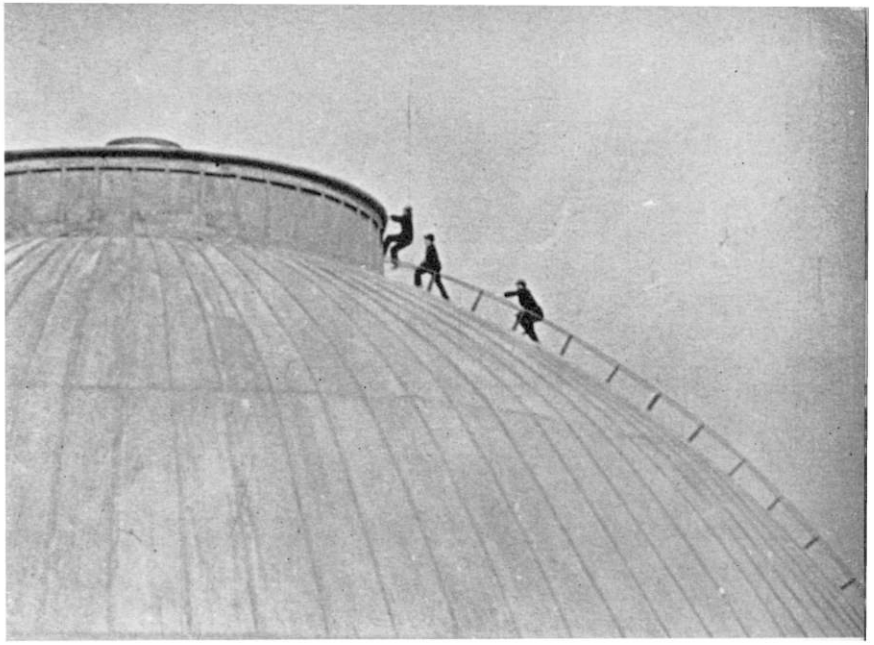
It was again a failure—B.I.P. held it back for release until after his next film, the highly successful *Blackmail*. It was melodramatic and laced with implausible coincidences. Yet it is important in the Hitchcock canon as the first emergence of his recurring transference of guilt theme, a motif first explored in detail by the critics of the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* during the 1950s.

The heroine was the beautiful Anny Ondra, imported from Germany. Her cool blonde features suggest that here is the prototype of the gallery of famous Hitchcock blondes in the years to come.

Fortunately for Hitchcock's reputation he was able to persuade John Maxwell, his producer at B.I.P., to let him choose his next film himself. He had read a play called *Blackmail* and with the help of its author, Charles Bennett, and Benn W. Levy, it was turned into a screenplay. *Blackmail* was made as a silent film. But already Al Jolson was singing on the screen of the Piccadilly Theatre in London; the Hollywood studios had jettisoned their current productions and were jumping on the sound wagon. The silent film era was virtually finished.



An attempt to record Ondra—her English was not good enough
Camera was kept in airless, soundproofed booth



Two frames from **Blackmail**. *Above:* British Museum chase

The talkies: 1929–39

An expensive decision was taken and *Blackmail* was turned into a sound picture. Consequently it was the first full-length British talkie. Much of it had to be reshot with the camera anchored inside the stuffy soundproof booth used before satisfactory camera covers ('blimps') had been devised. Anny Ondra's English was poor and Joan Barry dubbed in her lines. In those days the dubbing was done at the same time the scene was shot. Joan Barry had to crouch on the set out of the camera's reach, speaking the lines while Anny Ondra mimed. Looking back, Hitchcock feels that the dialogue in the first part of the film sounded like the titles being spoken aloud. Some of the original footage was retained with sound effects added. Imperfect as the sound-track was, the director was already using the additional medium with imagination. Two examples: the girl, after murdering an artist who tried to seduce her, sits in her father's shop contemplating the crime. Her fiancé, a detective, enters. She looks up at him and suspects that

Below: Halted taxi

he knows her guilt. The clang of the shop bell reverberates like the knell of judgement day. Again, an innocent breakfast conversation turns into a nightmare for the girl as the word 'knife' constantly recurs until it is the only coherent word that emerges from a jabbering babble.

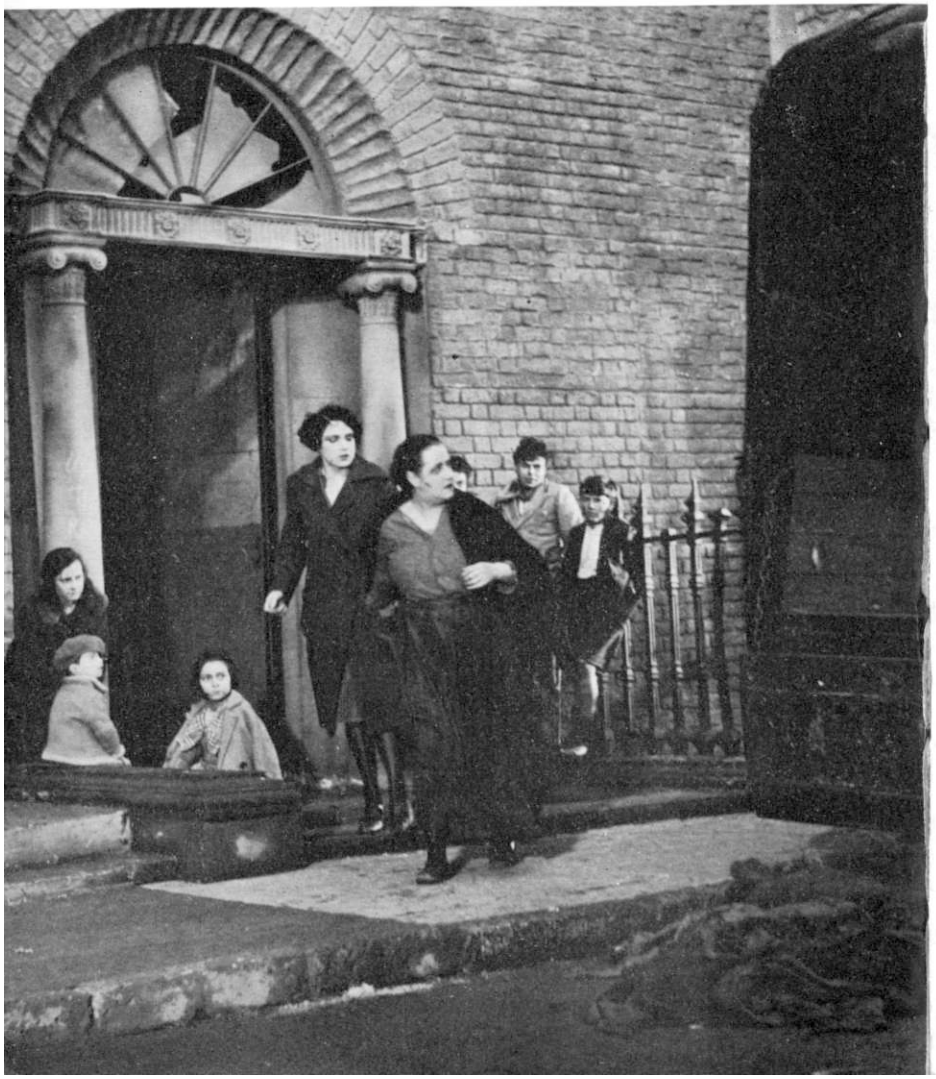
The spectacular chase through famous surroundings, a characteristic Hitchcockian element, makes its first appearance in *Blackmail*, with the blackmailer pursued to, and falling to his death from, the dome of the Reading Room in the British Museum. Hitchcock's ending was to have been ironic, the detective seeing the cell door shut on the arrested girl, going home and being asked if he was going out with his girl friend that evening—his answer: 'Not tonight.' This was unacceptable commercially and a happy ending was substituted.

The uncredited clapperboy on the film was Ronald Neame and Michael Powell was the stills photographer.

Opposite: John Longden, Anny Ondra and Donald Calthrop in newsagent's shop

Hitchcock's **Blackmail** appearance as pestered man on train

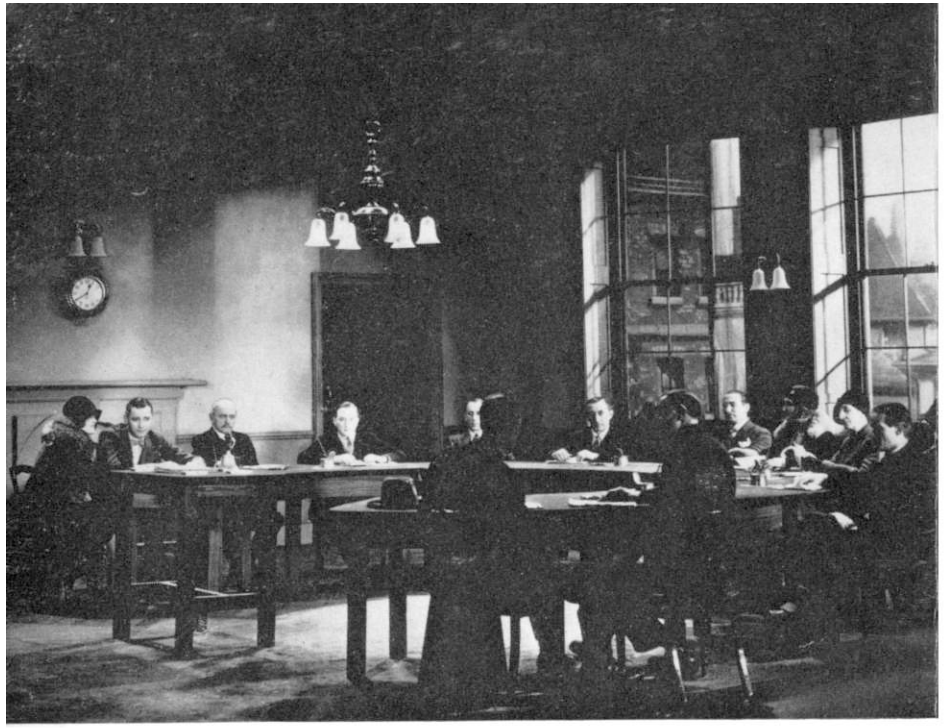
Sara Allgood and furniture truck in **Juno and the Paycock**



Frame from **Juno and the Paycock**—Sara Allgood

Elstree Calling in 1930 was the first British musical, a compilation of variety acts and musical numbers in the style of *Hollywood Revue* and other portmanteau films then hastily being assembled. Adrian Brunel invited Hitchcock to direct Gordon Harker in a couple of sketches, and he accepted.

His next full-length talking picture was *Juno and the Paycock*, from the play by Sean O'Casey. Sara Allgood was brilliantly cast as Juno, wife of the improvident Captain Boyle, the 'Paycock'. Edward Chapman played this part and in it made his name. The script kept very closely to the original text—'just a photograph of a stage play', according to Hitchcock. It was by no means a characteristic Hitchcock film, but it showed a growing control of the sound medium. O'Casey, pleased with the film's success, suggested to Hitchcock a story about Hyde Park. Hitchcock gave him the encouragement to go ahead. O'Casey wrote the play, *Within The Gates*, but it was never filmed.



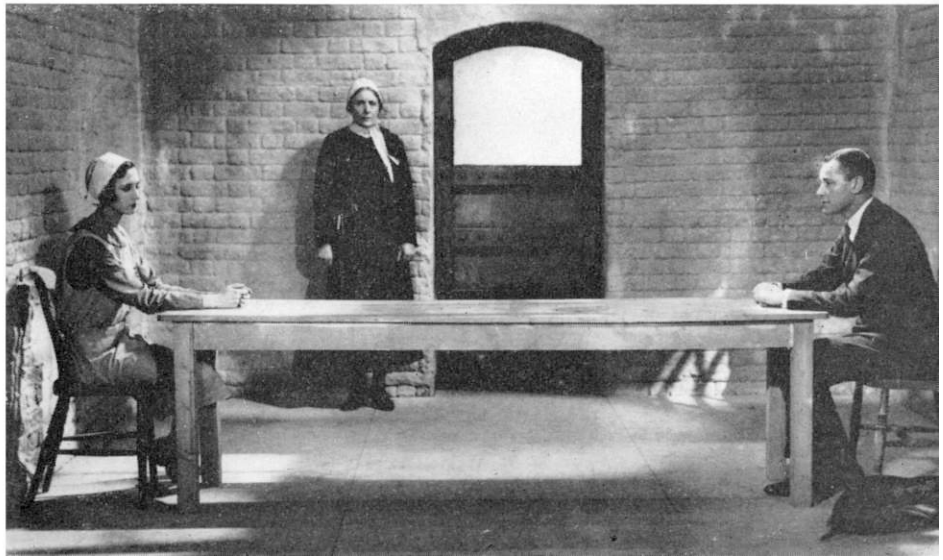
The Jury considers its verdict in **Murder**

The third talkie was a return to the thriller. From a story, *Enter Sir John*, by Clemence Dane and Helen Simpson (who wrote *Under Capricorn*, filmed by Hitchcock in the late forties), *Murder* was only the third thriller so far in a dozen films. In it Herbert Marshall played a very grand actor (a take-off of Sir Gerald du Maurier) convinced of the innocence of a beautiful girl languishing in the condemned cell. He sets out to unmask the real murderer, who turns out to be a transvestite trapeze artist. It was probably the first talking picture to use the now weary device of the tight-lipped big close-up, the character's spoken thoughts coming through on the sound-track. This sequence occurs in Marshall's bathroom. As he is shaving, he switches on a radio—the Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde* is being played. This was technically difficult in 1930—a thirty-piece orchestra had to be physically present out of camera range.

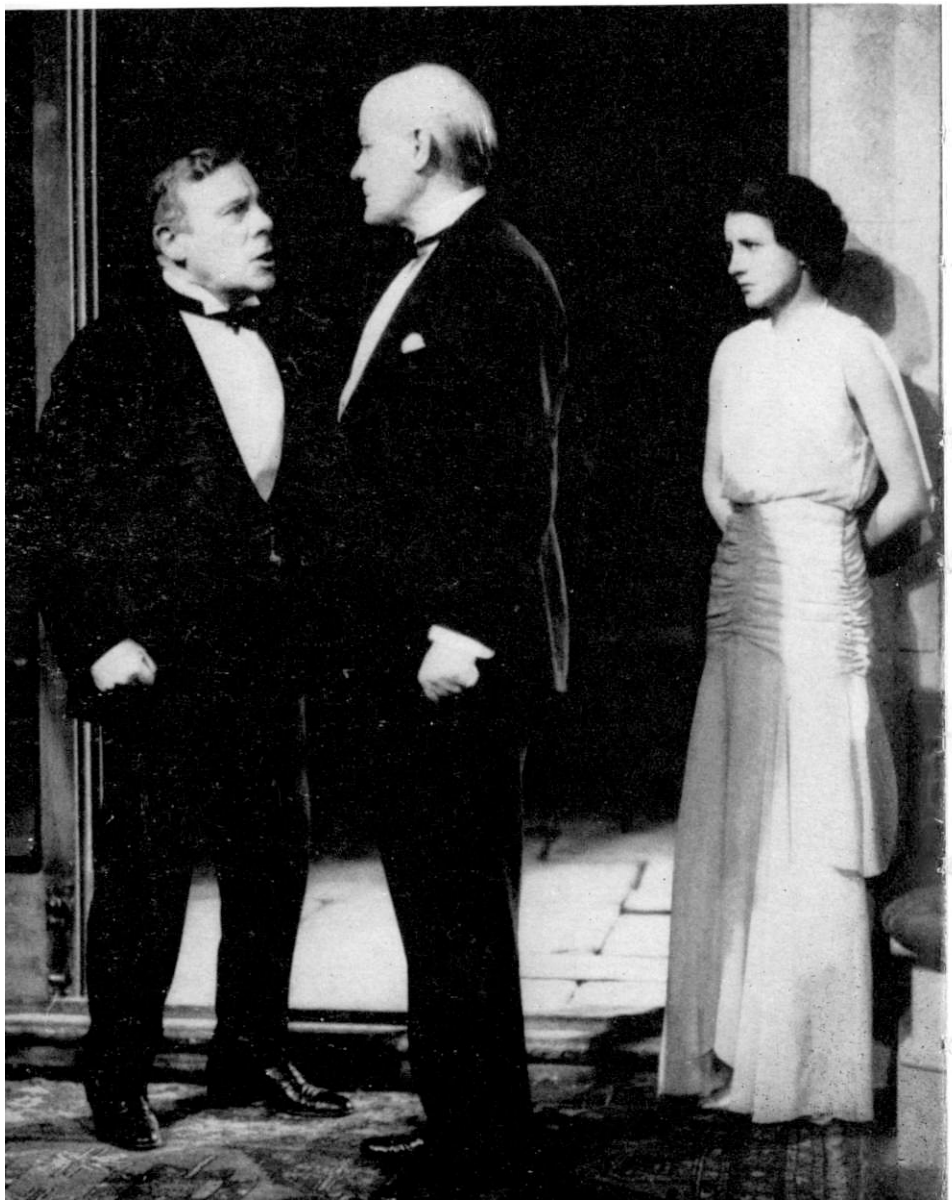
Another remarkable sound sequence was a scene in the jury room. Marshall is the only juror unconvinced by the circumstantial evidence of the girl's guilt. Gradually the other jurors round on him, their voices multiplying until they are chanting in a grotesque chorus. The verdict of 'guilty' and the death sentence are heard through the open door of an empty jury room.

There is a certain amount of class comedy in *Murder* that would be unacceptable and inappropriate today. Edward Chapman and Phyllis Konstam play humble members of a third-rate touring company who are summoned to Marshall's West End apartment to help him solve the case. They take breakfast with him and are cruelly shown to be out of their social depth, the man clumsy and rough-mannered, the girl appallingly genteel. The dialogue for this sequence was improvised by the actors in front of the cameras, an interesting early use of a technique even now considered *avant-garde*. Later Marshall, as the fastidious Sir John, stays in a cheap lodging and is rudely awakened by an early morning eruption of several noisy, dirty children into his bedroom, including a tiny girl who leaps on him and clasps him silently and immovably in a sticky embrace.

Sir John (Herbert Marshall) reassures the condemned girl (Norah Baring)



Edmund Gwenn, C. V. France and Jill Esmond in **The Skin Game**



Hitchcock relaxing with Phyllis Konstam during shooting of **The Skin Game**

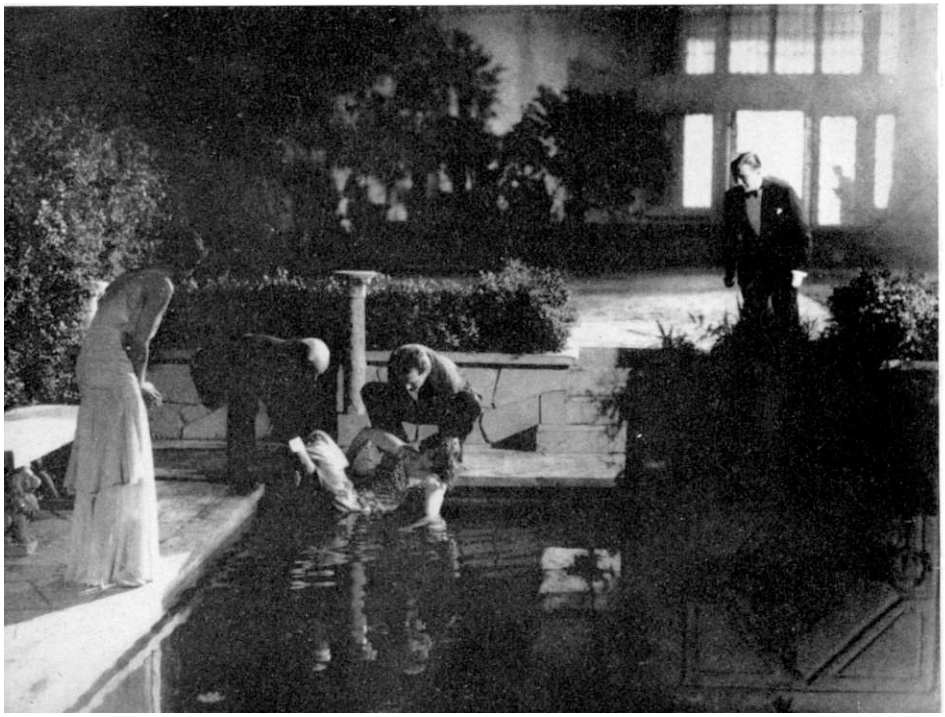
Until *Murder*, Mrs Hitchcock, Alma Reville, had worked on the continuity of all his productions. This time she collaborated on the screenplay and was to do so many more times, including the next film, *The Skin Game*. John Galsworthy's famous play—an attack on the futility of English snobbery—was a curious choice for Hitchcock. It was about the threat offered by a wealthy upstart tradesman to a staid country squirearchy which believes that through its presence for centuries, its corner of England is exclusive territory. Edmund Gwenn made an impressive debut as the thrusting Hornblower, while C. V. France and Helen Haye conveyed the unpleasant implacability of the landed gentry. It was an unsuitable vehicle for Hitchcock's talent and again a disappointment. The occasional glimpse of a well-photographed English rural landscape by Jack Cox recalled this cameraman's work on the equally unhappy rustic comedy of three years earlier, *The Farmer's Wife*.

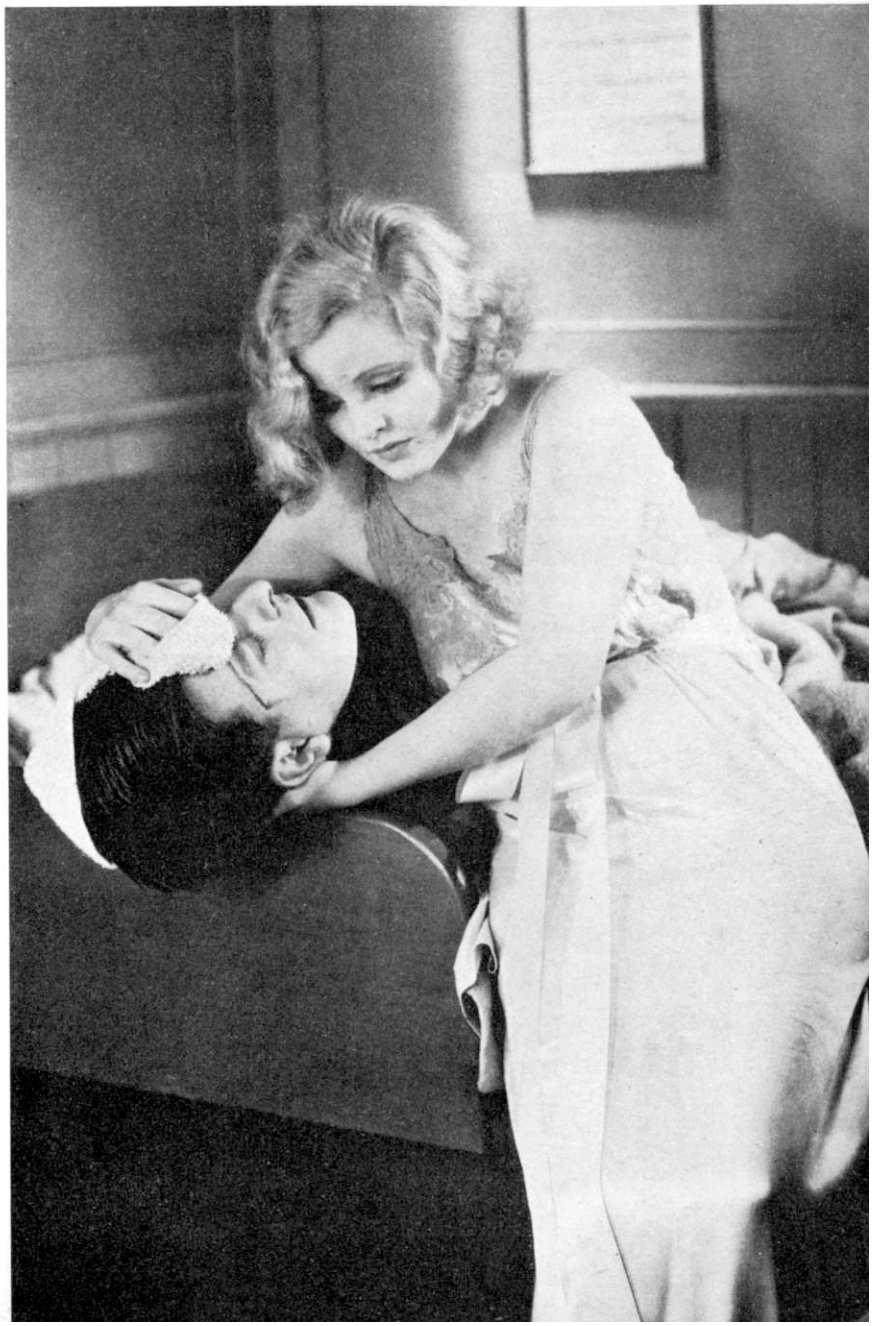
In spite of more disappointments than successes, Hitchcock was regarded as Britain's most important director. He was earning more than any other. He lived in a large, renaissance-style luxury flat near the Cromwell Road corner of the Earls Court Road (no lift, as he felt he needed the exercise to keep his already enormous paunch under control). He also owned a small, ancient manor house at Shamley Green, near Guildford, Surrey. It was, for him, a matter for great regret when he sold it to go to America in 1939. Its name is commemorated in the title of his present production company.

In 1932 Hitchcock filmed *Rich and Strange* with Joan Barry, who had dubbed Anny Ondra's voice in *Blackmail*, and Henry Kendall. The plot fell into two main parts—the first, a comedy of a bored suburban couple who use a legacy to take a world cruise.

Opposite: Joan Barry and Henry Kendall shipwrecked in **Rich and Strange**

Suicide scene in **The Skin Game**

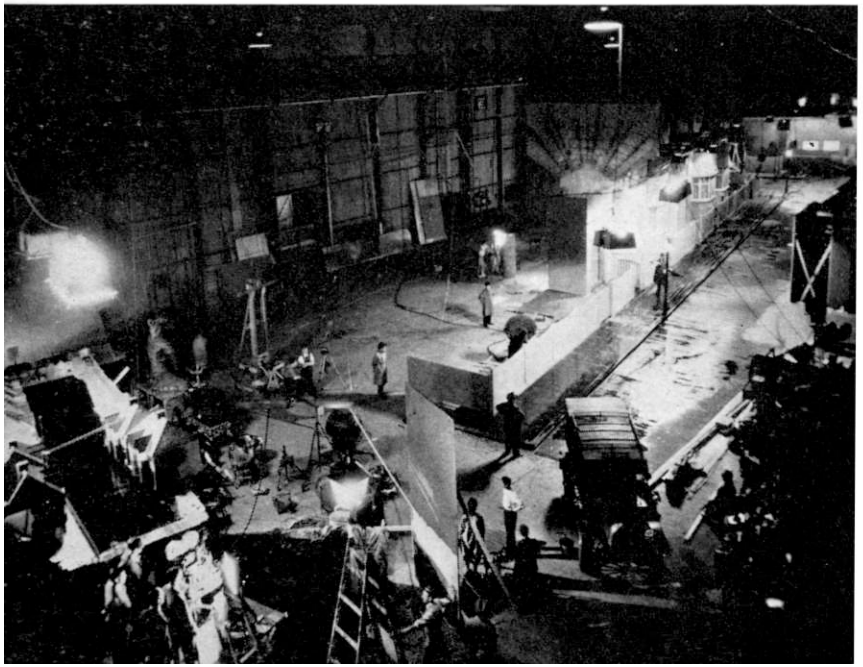


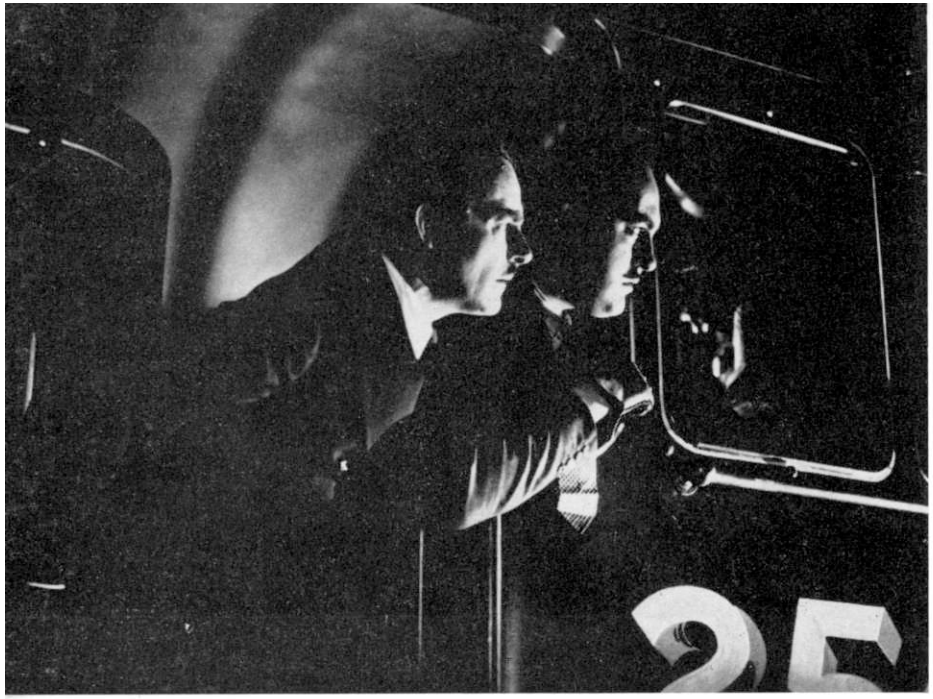


The girl, transplanted from humdrum domesticity into a new atmosphere of apparent romance and sophistication, becomes involved with a middle-aged colonial Englishman. Her buffoonish husband falls for a bogus princess who tricks him out of the remainder of the money. The second and more serious part of the story deals with the now wiser and unhappier couple returning home on a nondescript cargo-boat which sinks. They are rescued by a junkload of sad-faced, silent Chinamen who kill the ship's cat for chop suey and watch completely impassively when one of their number drowns horribly as he leaves the sinking ship. Most of the location footage was shot silent, in fact only a fifth of the film has dialogue. Consequently, the story is allowed to develop visually, a rarity in the early talkie days when static cameras witnessed barrages of talk. *Rich and Strange* was unsuccessful at the box-office; in retrospect it shows itself as one of Hitchcock's most interesting films and perhaps his bravest failure.

Opposite: Henry Kendall and Joan Barry exchange dull suburbia (*above*) for shipboard exotica (*below*). Betty Amann attracts his attention, his wife is eyed by Percy Marmont

Suburban street set at Elstree for **Rich and Strange**

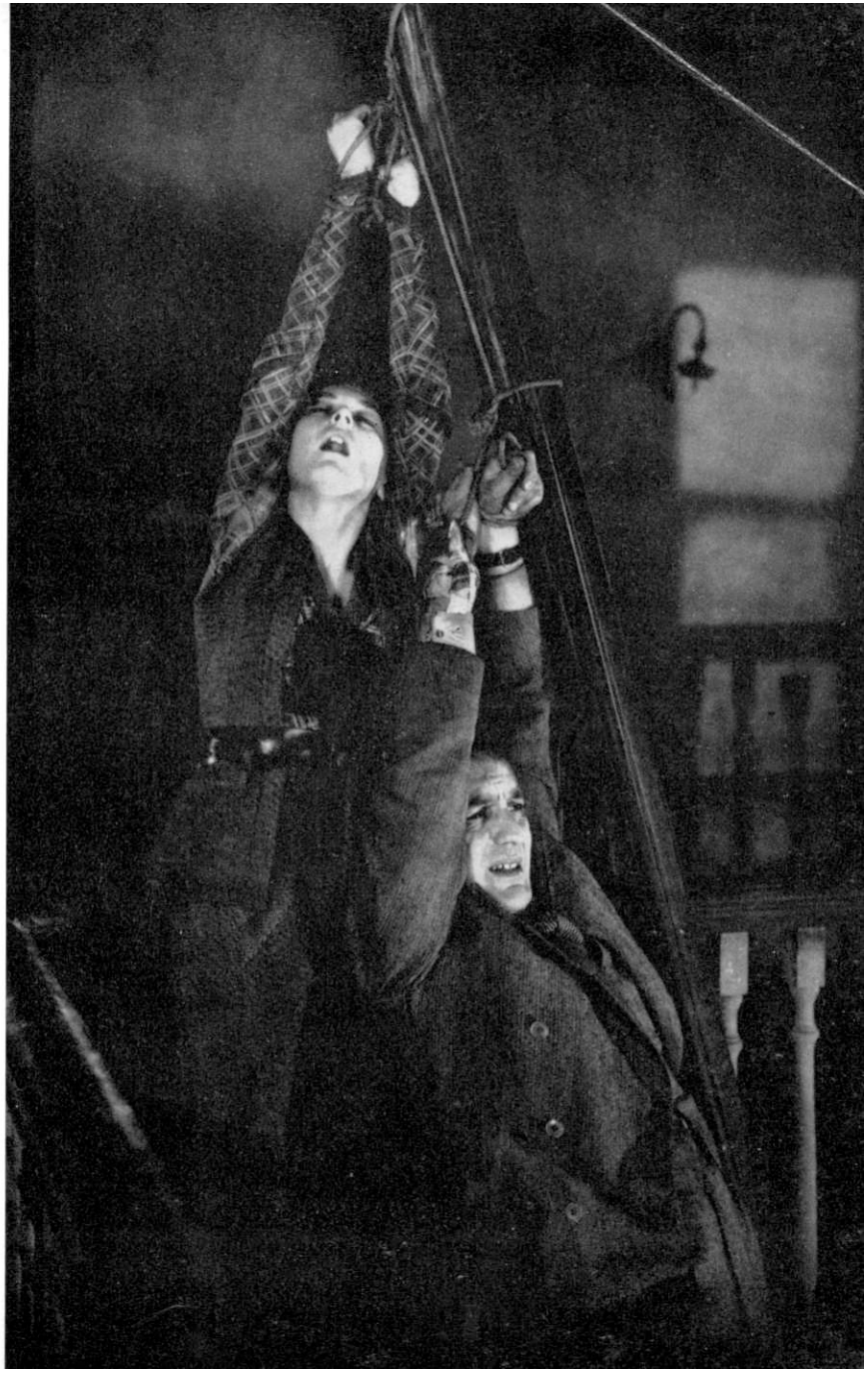




Donald Calthrop and Garry Marsh in **Number Seventeen**

Opposite: John Stuart and Ann Casson in a difficult situation

Number Seventeen was the last film he directed for B.I.P. Originally it was a play by Jefferson Farjeon, written for Leon M. Lion who was cast in his same role in the film as a tramp who unwittingly stumbles on a jewel thieves' hiding-place. It is a burlesque thriller, beginning with Hitchcock's introduction of the Old Dark House and ending in an absurd but exciting chase between a freight train and a Green Line coach. Its climax is a spectacular crash into the cross-channel ferry. It was a low-budget film but in the *genre* Hitchcock was happiest with. He piles on superb implausibilities—a man calling well after midnight and announcing: 'The agent sent us to see over the house'; the mute girl member of the jewel gang bursting into speech towards the end of the film: 'I'm not really dumb—it was just a crook's trick.' His use of model trains and cars in the chase is audaciously obvious—one suspects a certain contempt for his producers at the time.



Hitchcock directing **Number Seventeen**. Camera is now in primitive 'blimp'

The only cinema film he ever produced without directing was *Lord Camber's Ladies*, made in his final months at B.I.P. It was a hurriedly made, low-budget picture of the 'quota quickie' type, directed by Benn W. Levy and starring Gertrude Lawrence.

Then came *Waltzes from Vienna*, directed for Tom Arnold. Hitchcock considers this and *Champagne* his worst films. It was a piece of Viennese *schmaltz*, a musical about Strauss senior and Strauss junior. During the shooting, at the end of a weary day in Lime Grove Studios, Hitchcock told the despondent cast, 'I hate

Gertrude Lawrence in **Lord Camber's Ladies**

Fay Compton with Esmond Knight in **Waltzes from Vienna**

this sort of stuff. Melodrama is the only thing I can do.' The critics fell upon the film and tore it apart, and Hitchcock was castigated for leaving B.I.P. for the uncertain world of independent production. He then decided to rejoin Michael Balcon, now head of production at Gaumont-British. The next six consecutive films were all thrillers of a high order and eradicated the disappointments of the preceding years.

Esmond Knight as Johann Strauss

Peter Lorre (right) left Nazi Germany. **The Man Who Knew Too Much** was his first English-speaking film.
Opposite: Edna Best screams in the Albert Hall, thus foiling an assassin

The Man Who Knew Too Much was already in screenplay form before the unfortunate *Waltzes from Vienna*. Ironically, the completed film was greeted as Hitchcock's comeback. It was a kidnap story, opening with the assassination of a secret agent at St Moritz and moving rapidly through several imaginative settings to a gun-battle climax reminiscent of the celebrated Sidney Street siege in 1911. One of the most elaborate setpieces was a concert in the Royal Albert Hall at which a visiting statesman was to be murdered. Edna Best, the kidnapped girl's mother, who knew of the plot, stood up and screamed at the exact moment in the score when the gunman was to have fired, putting him off his aim. Most of the Albert Hall audience was a painting by the academician Fortunino Matania, reflected by a mirror into the lens. Lack of money forced Hitchcock to use his technical ingenuity to the full in staging ambitious scenes. The lessons were well-learned —few directors in modern Hollywood have a comparable technical mastery of the possibilities of celluloid.

Peter Lorre, who had given an outstanding performance in Fritz Lang's *M* two years earlier, left Germany when Hitler came to power. *The Man Who Knew Too Much* was his first British film. The other leading performers were Nova Pilbeam as the kidnapped child, Leslie Banks as her father and Edna Best as the sharp-shooting mother. Hitchcock revealed many characteristic touches—his red-herring technique, where apparently sinister situations turn out to be harmless and the reverse, the ordinary, innocent surroundings into which danger suddenly intrudes when one least expects it. The film moves at a fast pace, from Switzerland to London, from dentist's parlour to mission hall, and so quickly that implausibilities in the story are glossed over. It is the only film Hitchcock himself remade—in 1956. He found then that the hasty construction of the first film caused considerable scripting difficulties for the second. Nevertheless, it is an exhilarating picture and a convincing demonstration of Hitchcock's power to command an audience and induce an intended response.

Battle in East End chapel. From **The Man Who Knew Too Much**

Death in the night. Robert Donat, Lucie Mannheim, **The Thirty-Nine Steps**

The second Gaumont-British film was *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, made in the following year, 1935. The famous John Buchan adventure was merely the starting-point for Charles Bennett and Ian Hay's script. The original author was at first affronted, but later confessed that he felt Hitchcock's version was better. Richard Hannay, played by Robert Donat, flees from London when a mysterious woman he shelters for the night falls murdered across his bed. In Scotland he escapes his pursuers after dramatically leaving the train on the Forth Bridge, and unwittingly stumbles into the home of the arch villain, outwardly the most respected man in the neighbourhood. He finds himself on the run again across the heather moors, somehow handcuffed to a girl he met on the train. The film ends as it begins, in a theatre, with the death of Mr Memory, a music hall artist used by a gang to transmit stolen secret plans. Such is the zest of the Hitchcock plot that the original point of the title was totally forgotten, and half a line had to be added to the script at the end by way of explanation. Hitchcock has found that audiences never really care what the secret plans are, even if the characters on the screen go frantic in their attempts to retrieve them.

The bickering sexual relationship between Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll was the forerunner of many in the later Hitchcock films. Donat's line as the handcuffed Carroll struggles to pull off her stockings: 'Could I be of any assistance?' convulsed audiences and brought protests from purity organisations. The film was a chase in the archetypal tradition, the hero hunted both by the police and the wrongdoers. Particularly effective were the rapid changes of situation—the moment when Donat is about to be shot in the drawing-room of the master criminal and his wife, the majestic Helen Haye, marches in to announce that lunch is ready; or Donat escaping from the police station, blundering into a political meeting where he is taken for the guest speaker, and then having to deliver a nonsense speech which draws enthusiastic cheers from the audience.

The Thirty-Nine Steps was acclaimed by critics and public alike. It was a particular success in America, where Hitchcock was the only generally known British director. In Britain he was now being referred to as 'the Master'. Sydney Carroll in *The Sunday Times* wrote: 'In *The Thirty-Nine Steps* the identity and mind of Alfred Hitchcock are continuously discernible, in fact supreme. There is no doubt that Hitchcock is a genius. He is the real star of the film.'

Opposite: Handcuffed! Madeleine Carroll, Robert Donat, **The Thirty-Nine Steps**

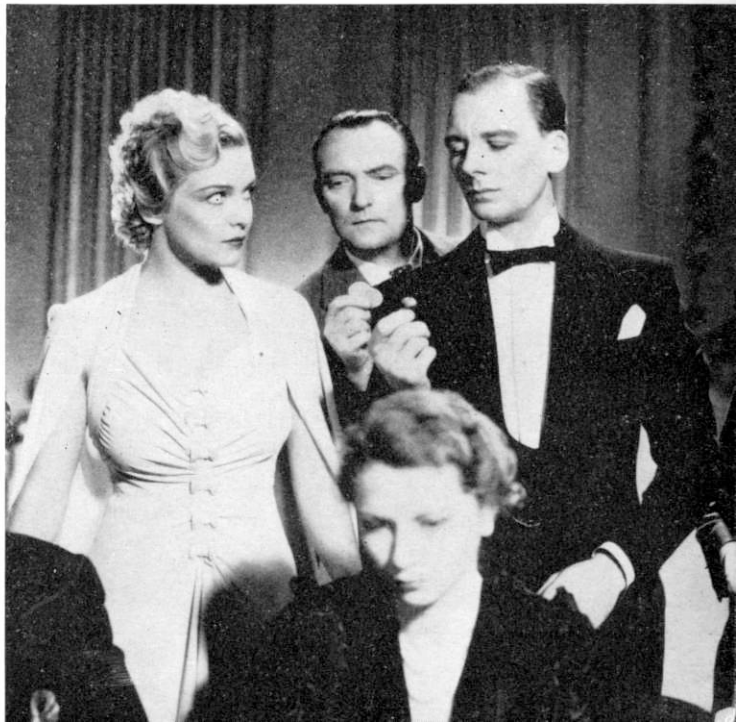
The missing finger. Hannay (Robert Donat) meets his foe (Godfrey Tearle)

Madeleine Carroll was cast in the next film, *The Secret Agent*, with John Gielgud as Ashenden, Somerset Maugham's successful novelist who is lured into the secret service during the Great War. Peter Lorre reappeared as a bizarre and rather endearing Mexican assassin. Robert Young came over from Hollywood to play a neutral American who turns out to be the dangerous German spy.

In the course of the action an innocent man is killed in the mistaken belief that he is the secret agent. Although the Lorre character accepts the error as a natural enough wartime mistake, Ashenden and his bogus wife, both novices in espionage, are affected by the burden of guilt thrown upon them. Guilt is a common motivation in Hitchcock. Hannay, for example, in the previous film, sets out to catch the criminals to expiate his culpability in allowing the woman who came to him for protection to be killed.

Opposite: Gielgud and Peter Lorre find a body

Madeleine Carroll and John Gielgud in **The Secret Agent**



The Secret Agent is rich in typical imaginative strokes—the Swiss chocolate factory which turns out to be the headquarters of a spy ring, the single monotonous organ note blaring out across a valley, its cause a body slumped across the keyboard. At the end of the film, as in *Number Seventeen*, there is a spectacular train wreck. The mortally injured spy shoots the Mexican—not quite the ending Hitchcock intended, for he wanted the dying spy to beg for water, the gloating Mexican to hand him his hip flask, then to shoot him as he drinks. The censor prevailed.

This film did not repeat the success of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Hitchcock felt that this was due to the negative characterisation of the Gielgud role. 'You can't root for a hero who doesn't want to be a hero.'

On set for the train wreck: Madeleine Carroll, Peter Lorre, director Hitchcock and Robert Young

Sabotage—small boy with bomb to deliver gets delayed

By a confusing coincidence the next film was Conrad's *The Secret Agent* which Hitchcock retitled *Sabotage* (a few years later he further increased the confusion by making a film called *Saboteur*). The story was brought up to date and Verloc, the anarchist plotting to overthrow London, was made the owner of a small cinema. He was played by Oscar Homolka, and his young wife by Sylvia Sidney, whose Hollywood career at that time had undergone a slight sag. Hitchcock would have liked Donat for the part of Ted, the detective posing as a grocer's assistant—instead he had to use John Loder.

Two sequences in the film are remarkable. The first is the protracted journey of Mrs Verloc's young brother through London, unwittingly carrying a bomb under his arm to be left at Piccadilly Circus tube station. Delays on the way—he gets involved with a salesman demonstrator, pauses to watch the Lord Mayor's Show go by—increase the suspense as the time for the bomb to explode approaches. He is on a bus when it happens and all the passengers are killed. Hitchcock's view of this sequence is that it was one of

his biggest errors of judgement—after the suspense build-up the explosion is anti-climatic. It is like letting the buzz-saw kill the girl strapped to the log—something that is never done in the cinema.

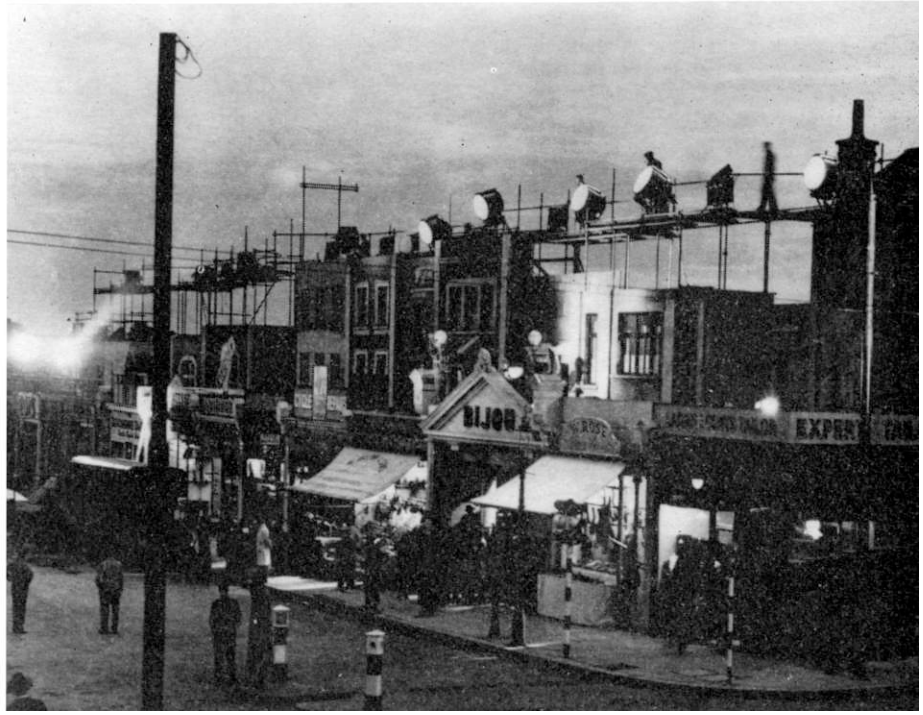
The other sequence follows when Mrs Verloc receives the news of her brother's death. She stands in the auditorium of the cinema; on the screen is a Silly Symphony, *Who Killed Cock Robin?*, and the audience is laughing. Against her will, she too begins to join in. Later, as she prepares her husband's dinner, she looks first at the carving-knife, then at his back. After a few moments' hesitation during which he seems to be imploring her to get it over with, she kills him. The scene is played without dialogue —to Miss Sidney's consternation; this was to be her big moment. Hitchcock persuaded her to play it his way and it was one of the most effective scenes of her career.

It was the last Hitchcock film produced by Michael Balcon, who then left Gaumont-British to make *A Yank at Oxford* for M.G.M. and after that started up independent production at Ealing Studios.

Mr and Mrs Hitchcock attend a 1935 première

Sylvia Sidney will shortly murder Oscar Homolka with the carving knife

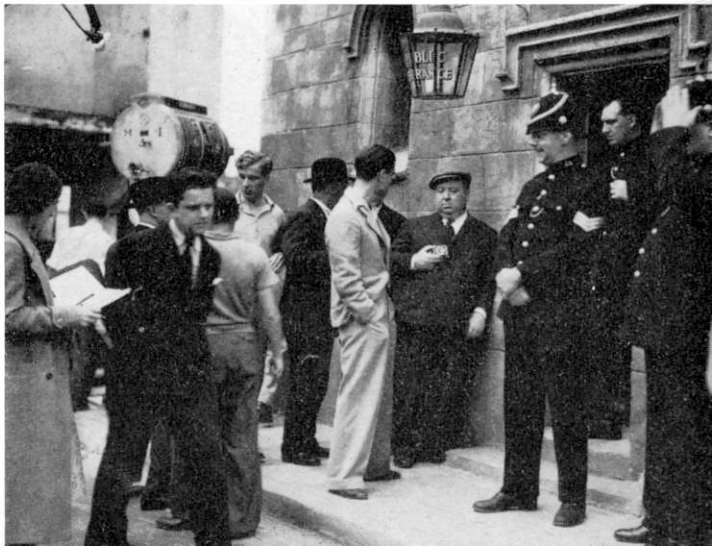
Outdoor set for **Sabotage**—a convincing London street



In 1937 G.B., for financial reasons, finished as a production company although its associate, Gainsborough Pictures, continued at Shepherd's Bush. Hitchcock was now back under the banner beneath which he started directing. He selected for his next work Josephine Tey's first thriller, *A Shilling for Candles*. Charles Bennett turned it into a screenplay, retaining the central theme of the young man accused of a murder he did not commit and shaping up the part of the daughter of the Chief Constable who helps him to find the real criminal. At the time Hitchcock wrote in a newspaper article: 'We went into a huddle and slowly from discussions, arguments, random suggestions, casual, desultory talk and furious intellectual quarrels as to what such and such a character in such a situation would or would not do, the scenario began to take shape. The difficulty of writing a motion-picture story is to make things not only logical but visual. You have got to be able to see why someone does this, why someone goes there. It is no use *telling* people, they have got to *see*. We are making pictures, moving pictures, and though sound helps and is the most valuable advance the films have ever made, they still remain primarily a visual art.'

Opposite: The fugitive (Derrick de Marney), and the Chief Constable's daughter (Nova Pilbeam)

Hitchcock as camera-carrying spectator in **Young and Innocent**



Children's party in **Young and Innocent**, with Basil Radford and Mary Clare

First visit to New York, in 1937. Left to right, Alma Hitchcock, secretary Joan Harrison, 'Hitch', now 21-stone, and nine-year-old Patricia Hitchcock

The resulting production, *Young and Innocent*, is his favourite among his British films. It is the double chase theme again—the hero pursued by the police and in pursuit of the real villain. Derrick de Marney is the young man and Nova Pilbeam, the child kidnap victim of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the girl. Its settings range from the open Cornish coast to a claustrophobic doss-house. In one audacious scene the hero, on the run, breaks in on a children's party and passes himself off as a guest, even to the extent of offering a piece of garden statuary as a present. The biggest piece of technical bravura comes at the climax of this highly entertaining film. The villain is known to have a twitching eye and at a *thé dansant* in a seaside town the heroine spots him playing in the dance band in blackface makeup. In a single shot, across what was then Pinewood's biggest sound stage, the crane-mounted camera tracks in from 145 feet to a mere 4 inches from the drummer's twitching eye. The director was to use a similar shot in *Notorious*, some years later.

On set at Islington with Michael Redgrave and Margaret Lockwood

Opposite: Margaret Lockwood, Michael Redgrave and Paul Lukas in **The Lady Vanishes**

It was back to spies in central Europe for the next picture, *The Lady Vanishes*, probably the best known of Hitchcock's British films (it was distributed by M.G.M.). It was also the fourth time Hitchcock had used a train for a major part of the action (earlier *Number Seventeen*, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *The Secret Agent*; later *Suspicion*, *Strangers on a Train*, *North by Northwest*).

A girl (Margaret Lockwood) befriends an elderly lady who inexplicably disappears from the train bringing them back from a Balkan holiday resort. Attempts are made to persuade the girl that she has had a hallucination—that the woman never existed. But with the aid of a young itinerant composer (Michael Redgrave), she discovers that the woman is a British secret agent who has been kidnapped in the course of bringing back important information. There is a battle between the returning English holidaymakers on the train and the agents of the foreign power, but eventually the secrets reach England safely.

Linden Travers and Naunton Wayne in **The Lady Vanishes**

The atmosphere of *The Lady Vanishes*, in spite of the menace of the espionage situation, is essentially humorous. The gallery of characters involved are stock comic figures—a lawyer on an illicit holiday with another man's wife, for instance. Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne make their first screen appearance in the familiar 'silly ass' roles of Charters and Caldicott, two cricket-obsessed Englishmen concerned only with getting back in time for the Test match.

The film moves with the characteristic pace of the pre-Hollywood Hitchcock. The script was the work of Sidney Gilliatt and Frank Launder, who later formed an effective production team, and the photography was by Jack Cox who had not worked with Hitchcock since the B.I.P. days. The film was released at about the time of the Munich crisis and the international tension of the time provided an appropriate climate for its reception. *The Lady Vanishes* was among the most successful pictures of 1938 and was the last of six fine thrillers produced by Hitchcock in four years. Now his contract with G.B. had come to an end and he was on the market.

At last, after visiting Hollywood for the first time, he decided to accept one of many offers which had come from America. He signed a seven-year contract with David O. Selznick who was then producing *Gone With the Wind*, the most publicised film of the decade. There was time before leaving for Hollywood to make one more picture. The choice was an unfortunate epitaph to his career in Britain, which had brought considerable international prestige to the industry. It was *Jamaica Inn*, a costume melodrama based on Daphne du Maurier's novel about Cornish smugglers. *Film Weekly* described the result as a 'penny dreadful'.

Hitchcock always seems to be at his best with actors who have an understated style—Cary Grant and James Stewart being the favourites. In *Jamaica Inn* the flamboyant performance of Charles Laughton was apparently beyond the director's control. As the villainous Sir Humphrey Pengallen, the local Justice of the Peace

Chubby pair—Charles Laughton and Hitchcock discuss the **Jamaica Inn** script

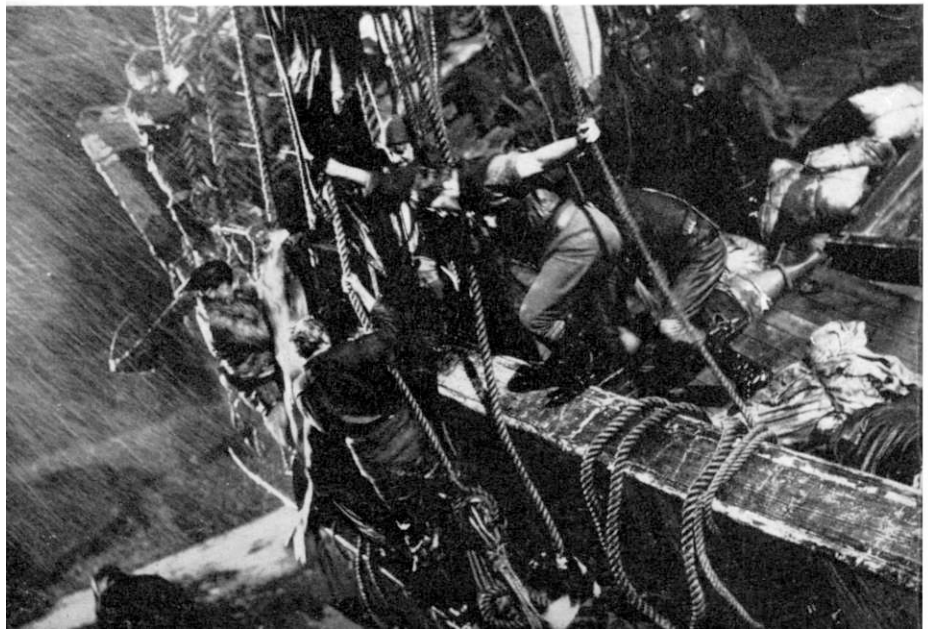
but in reality the leader of the wreckers, his character study was greatly in excess of the weight the part demanded. Maureen O'Hara made a limp debut as an improbable heroine. Hitchcock concluded the film with the villainous Sir Humphrey falling from the rigging of his ship to his death; falls from a great height are a common fate for evildoers in his films.

To make *Jamaica Inn* Hitchcock returned to Elstree, and the co-producer of the film with Charles Laughton was Erich Pommer, the head of UFA when Hitchcock had made his first two films in the twenties. In spite of the poor critical reaction, the film did quite well at the box-office, partly because Hitchcock's name sold films, and partly because the supporting cast and story had popular appeal.

Hitchcock felt that he had run out of steam and for this reason he was eager to get to Hollywood to begin a fresh stage of his development. In the summer of 1939 he sold his London and Surrey homes and sailed, accompanied by his wife and daughter, and his secretary Joan Harrison, who had worked on the script of his last picture and who, after many years' association, was to be the producer of his television series in the mid-fifties.

Opposite: Maureen O'Hara gets her bearings

Wreckers at work in **Jamaica Inn**

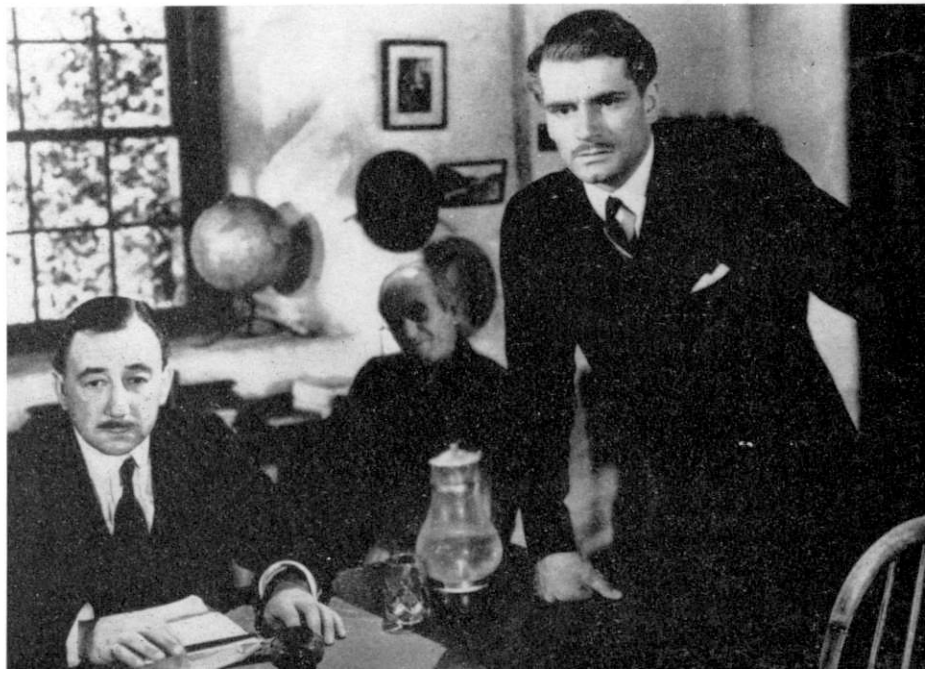


Hollywood—the first period: 1939–50

Alfred Hitchcock's first American picture was again a Daphne du Maurier story—*Rebecca*, about the second wife of a wealthy Cornish landowner whose marriage is dominated by the invisible presence of the dead first wife. It was a carefully constructed trying-out of the superior technical resources now at his disposal. Joan Fontaine, until then a player in B pictures, was launched on a successful star career. Laurence Olivier played the brooding husband who is eventually unjustly accused of the first wife's murder. His obsessed housekeeper, who keeps Rebecca's spirit alive, was chillingly acted by Judith Anderson.

Opposite: With Maureen O'Hara on the set of **Jamaica Inn** at Elstree

Laurence Olivier in **Rebecca**, Hitchcock's first Hollywood film



Joan Fontaine with Judith Anderson in **Rebecca**

Franz Waxman's musical score helped to suggest the unseen presence of Rebecca, with the accompaniment of slow-tracking shots through the empty corridors and staircases of Manderley. Joan Fontaine's ability to suggest the torment of the unhappy successor is demonstrated in the scene where she attempts an unconscious imitation in the belief that this is the only way to get her husband's attentions, and appears at a fancy-dress party in a dress identical to the one worn by Rebecca the year before.

It was a change of mood for Hitchcock, a much more measured and constrained film than most of his earlier pictures. The rapid, vigorous pace was replaced by measured, polished gloss. It was favourably reviewed by every New York newspaper, voted to the head of the list of the top ten films of 1940 in the *Motion Picture Herald* poll and also received the Academy Award for 1940—the only Hitchcock film to get the 'Best film of the year' Oscar.

In Europe the war had been in progress for several months, and Hitchcock expressed a desire to return. He was now well over military age and the British authorities urged him to remain in Hollywood to do what he could to espouse the Allied cause in neutral America. His second American film is alleged to have upset Dr Goebbels. *Foreign Correspondent* was a fast-moving, highly entertaining thriller, reminiscent of his best British films but dosed with a hard core of anti-isolationist propaganda. It was about a naïve newspaperman (Joel McCrea), sent by his cynical proprietor to cover the European situation from a position of wide-eyed ignorance. He falls in love with the daughter (Laraine Day) of the head of an international peace organisation (Herbert

Overleaf: the ballroom set, in **Saboteur**, built at a cost of £12,000 with an additional £2,500 spent on decorations

Crash stations in **Foreign Correspondent**: Laraine Day, Joel McCrea, Herbert Marshall and George Sanders

Eduardo Ciannelli and Herbert Marshall in **Foreign Correspondent**

Marshall) who turns out to be a spy chief. The action flits from London to Amsterdam where there is a remarkable assassination, the killer posing as a Press photographer with a gun concealed in the camera. (In Teheran a year later this very method was used for a real assassination.) In another sequence Edmund Gwenn plays a delightful murderer who tempts the hero to the top of Westminster Cathedral in order to push him off. He takes the plunge himself when his intended victim inconsiderately steps aside. The climax of the film is a spectacular attack on a flying-boat in mid-Atlantic, shot from within the cabin. Seldom has the studio tank produced such realistic seas as these, which rage across the actors as they cling to the broken wreckage of the downed aircraft. The film ends with McCrea broadcasting to America from a bomb-stricken London. As the studio personnel rush to the shelters and the bombs begin to fall, he urges his listeners not to ignore the peril of Europe. *Foreign Correspondent* came out during the Battle of

Britain and shortly before the blitz on London. It undoubtedly had some effect on American opinion, already conditioned by the 'fifth column' menace.

An uncharacteristic Hitchcock film, *Mr and Mrs Smith*, followed —a marital comedy with Carole Lombard and Robert Montgomery. Hitchcock took over a ready-made Norman Krasna script; his direction was unexciting and he was clearly not at home in this alien *genre*, more akin to the present-day Ross Hunter type of film. One memorable scene was a visit by the couple, on their anniversary, to a restaurant they had known during courtship. Their attempt to recapture the past is disastrous—the management has changed, the food is unpleasant and the proprietor surly.

Betty Compson, the expensive star of *Woman to Woman*, the first film Hitchcock was closely involved with nearly twenty years

Robert Montgomery and Carole Lombard as **Mr and Mrs Smith**

Joan Fontaine, Cary Grant and Nigel Bruce in **Suspicion**

earlier, played a small part. During the course of shooting this film Carole Lombard, whose sense of humour matched the Master's, mocked his legendary 'actors are cattle' attitude by installing a little corral stocked with calves in the studio.

Hitchcock spent most of his Selznick contract on loan to other companies—*Foreign Correspondent* was made by Walter Wanger, *Mr and Mrs Smith* and *Suspicion* by RKO, his next two films by Universal, then one by Twentieth Century Fox. He did not return to Selznick until 1945.

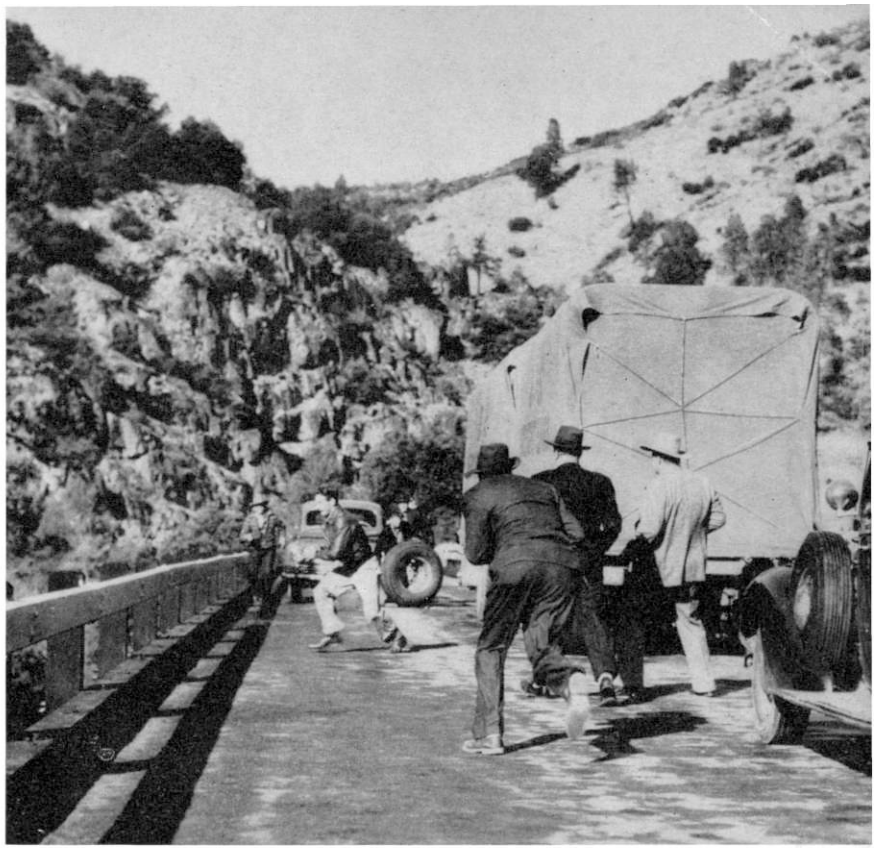
Suspicion was Hitchcock's first film with Cary Grant, who was to be one of his favourite leading actors. He played an irresponsible, attractive playboy who meets a sensitive, wealthy girl (Joan Fontaine) on a train and marries her after a rapid romance. His carelessness with money and the curious death of a silly friend (Nigel Bruce) lead her to suspect that he is a murderer and she is

Cary Grant, Joan Fontaine. Is he trying to kill her or save her?

his next victim. Every action that he performs from then on is interpreted by her as a means to her end. She imagines the glass of milk brought to her bedside to be laced with slow poison. Once again Hitchcock was frustrated in the way he wanted the film to conclude: Cary Grant was to have given her the last fatal glass of milk—she was to have handed him some letters before drinking it, one of which was to her mother saying that she loved her husband although he was a murderer, and was content to die for him, but that he should not be left to do it to anyone else. The final shot would have shown a cheerful Grant posting the incriminating letter. This was unacceptable to the producers, who felt that Grant in a villainous role would not be good box office. A tame, happy ending was substituted. In spite of the consequent implausibility of her role, Joan Fontaine won an Oscar for the best performance of 1941.

Saboteur was a wartime story, made after Pearl Harbor and the American entry into the war. Robert Cummings was a factory-worker framed on a sabotage charge after the plant catches fire. Like *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Young and Innocent* it was a double chase, the hero in pursuit of the true criminals and himself pursued by the police. Echoes of earlier films abounded; for example, the hero, like Donat, spends much of his time on the run concealing handcuffs on his wrist. The trail leads from Boulder Dam to the house of a rich rancher who is really a spy chief; there follows a journey eastwards, with a reluctant heroine who believes in the hero, first by car then convoyed amid a freakish circus troupe. Hero and heroine, unsuitably dressed, attend a fashionable ball with the threat of swift death as soon as they leave the floor. The climax takes place on the Statue of Liberty where the real saboteur is confronted. Pursued to the tiny platform surrounding the flame of the torch, he loses his footing and is held by the coat-sleeve. One by one the stitches around his shoulder give way until, with a hideous scream, he drops to his death, leaving the hero clutching an empty sleeve.

Priscilla Lane and Robert Cummings meet the Bearded Lady—**Saboteur**



Making a getaway—Robert Cummings in **Saboteur**

Hitchcock was not satisfied with the casting of this film, and this may help to explain why, in spite of spectacular effects and imaginative, realistic settings, *Saboteur* falls a little flat. Ideally, he would have preferred to have had Gary Cooper and Barbara Stanwyck, neither of whom ever appeared in a Hitchcock film. He had to make do with Robert Cummings and Priscilla Lane, who must have felt dispirited at being second-best.

It was reported at the time that the producers, Frank Lloyd and Jack H. Skirball, had bought the original story by Hitchcock for £24,000, provided that he would undertake to direct it. It was also the first film in which the name 'Alfred Hitchcock' was billed over the title in larger letters than the actors.

Teresa Wright and MacDonald Carey in **Shadow of a Doubt**

Opposite: Teresa Wright, MacDonald Carey, Joseph Cotten and Patricia Collinge

In 1943 Hitchcock made the film he considers to be his best. It was *Shadow of a Doubt*, shot largely on location in the small, north Californian town of Santa Rosa. Thornton Wilder collaborated on the screenplay, which was about Charlie—a smooth, charming murderer specialising in wealthy widows who hides out at the home of his smalltown sister. His niece, also called Charlie, who adores her uncle, begins to suspect him and he tries to kill her. In the final attempt he is himself killed by a train, and a friendly detective collaborates in allowing him an honourable funeral and the secret is withheld from the family. Joseph Cotten as the uncle and Teresa Wright as the niece play out the parts as an allegory of good and evil. In the end it is young Charlie who is responsible for Uncle Charlie's death, itself a kind of exorcism of what seems to be the darker side of her own character.

Hitchcock used a trick exploited by Orson Welles in *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* whereby characters interrupt and talk across one another, and half-heard small talk and background conversation flows naturally. It is a finely conceived film with what is perhaps Hitchcock's most ordered and logically worked out screenplay.

Lifeboat—Hume Cronyn, Henry Hull, Tallulah Bankhead, John Hodiak, Mary Anderson and Canada Lee

In *Lifeboat* he attempted a more dangerous allegory by distilling the world conflict into the interplay of characters torpedoed and drifting together in mid-Atlantic. The Nazi captain of the U-Boat which has sunk them and is in turn sunk, is hauled into the lifeboat before the others realise who he is. But they let him stay because he is the only one with any seamanship. Later they discover that he has been stealing their water and simultaneously steering them towards a German supply ship. Much of the film is a debate with communist stoker, business magnate, negro, woman journalist and other stock types putting the views of their counterparts in the world at large. It is a claustrophobic film, made as Hitchcock alleges 'to prove that most pictures are shot in close-ups'. It appeared during the middle of the war, when Europe was getting prepared for the D-Day invasion. Hitchcock was in trouble in some quarters for making the Nazi the most cunning, resourceful and powerful character, and it was suggested that he had fallen victim to the ideology. His defence was that he wanted to demonstrate that the enemy was not to be underestimated and that the only way to destroy him was by a coalition of forces.

Hitchcock's personal signature, a minute appearance in all his films after *The Lodger*, was achieved with typical ingenuity—he posed for an advertisement photograph seen momentarily on a scrap of newspaper in the boat. In *Rope*, a later film with a limited cast, he was a neon sign for the same product—a bogus slimming aid.

Most of **Lifeboat** was shot in studio tank at Twentieth Century Fox

Bon Voyage—made in French for the Ministry of Information

At the end of 1943 he managed to obtain a temporary release from his contract and returned to England. At Associated British Studios, Welwyn Garden City, he made two short films for the Ministry of Information with a cast of French actors banded together under the title of The Molière Players. The films, made in French, were shown throughout France after the Liberation. No release copies of the two pictures, *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, were made for English-speaking countries. Hitchcock's salary during the assignment was a modest £10 per week.

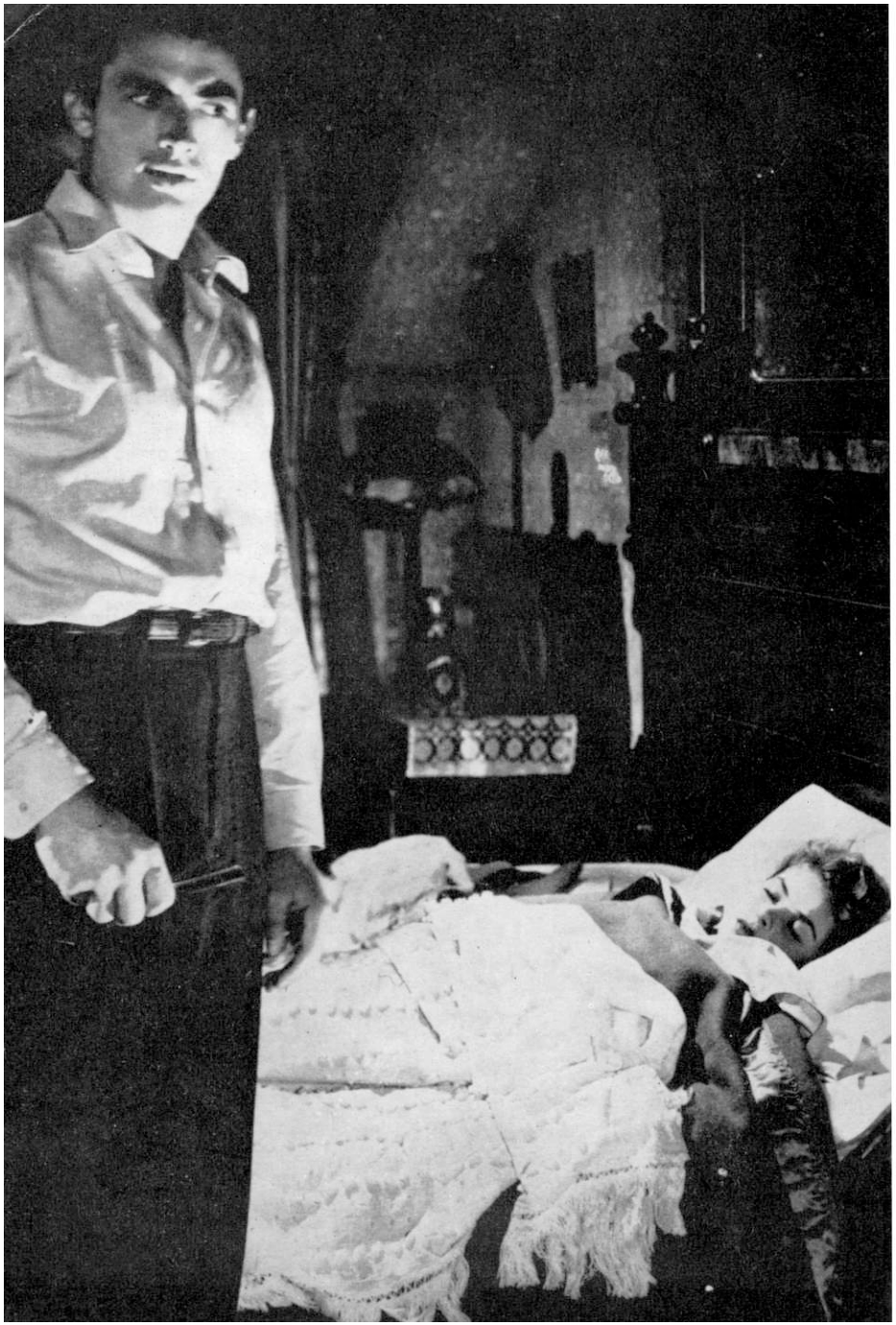
After several months in wartime England, Hitchcock left once more. There had been the possibility of a film about German prison camps, but this fell through. So he returned to Hollywood to fulfil his Selznick contract.

Aventure Malgache—a story of French resistance in Madagascar

His first postwar film, *Spellbound*, was a send-up of a current trend in psychiatric thrillers and was written by Ben Hecht. Ingrid Bergman played a doctor who suspects that the new head of the asylum, a much younger man than expected (Gregory Peck), is an amnesiac who has possibly murdered the real doctor and assumed his identity. It turns out to be another guilt complex—she restores his memory and uncovers a traumatic childhood experience in which he caused his brother's death in a fall. The real doctor had fallen to his death when they were out ski-ing together and he had subconsciously assumed the guilt, at the same time losing his memory.

The trappings included a dream sequence conceived by Salvador Dali and a revolver pointed at the audience exploding in a crimson flash. Freudian symbols were introduced at certain points of the plot, for example, a door opening at the moment of the first embrace. The film was glossily produced and wildly improbable —it also betrayed a fascinated and horrified preoccupation with psychiatry.

With Ingrid Bergman—Hitchcock's star of **Spellbound**



Cary Grant, Ingrid Bergman and Hitchcock on the set of **Notorious**

Opposite: Gregory Peck and Ingrid Bergman in **Spellbound**

In *Notorious* he teamed Ingrid Bergman with Cary Grant, a much more relaxed partner than the wooden Gregory Peck. Again, it was a glossily produced film, this time richly photographed by Ted Tetzlaff, and was a return to the world of spies and counter-spies. Ingrid Bergman was Alicia, daughter of a convicted traitor who has committed suicide in prison. In expiation of his guilt she agrees to help Devlin, a Government agent (Cary Grant), to track down a group of Nazis in Rio. Sebastian, their leader (Claude Rains), is an old admirer and she is required to marry him in order to gain proof of his activities. At a party Devlin and Alicia find uranium particles concealed in the wine cellar, but Sebastian, aware of the discovery, begins a slow process of poisoning his wife. Finally, Devlin comes to the house and takes Alicia away, leaving Sebastian to face the wrath of his associates.

Conference in Rio—from **Notorious**

The film is primarily a study of relationships rather than a straight thriller. The girl is loose, the agent cynical—but this is their surface aspect. On their arrival in Rio they have an affair, beautifully photographed in a flowing, prolonged close-up embrace extending from the balcony across a luxurious apartment to the telephone. But Devlin will not bring himself to admit that she is anything more than a sexual adventuress—her apparent willingness to go through with the marriage to Sebastian strengthens this view. She in turn has been hoping that Devlin will stop her. Sebastian is shown as a gentle, considerate man of taste with a genuine love for Alicia. Even when he discovers her trickery, it is his mother (only Hitchcock could give a Nazi spy chief a dominating mother!) who takes the initiative in organising a painless method of disposal. Devlin's realisation that something is wrong comes almost too late—as it is, he can only manage to carry Alicia off to hospital on the very brink of death.

There are several effective moments. The most famous is a swooping crane shot at the party—the camera starting at the top of the wide staircase with a general view of the glittering scene, and coming to rest with a big close-up of the key to the forbidden cellar clutched in Ingrid Bergman's hand. Later there is some suspenseful cross-cutting between the diminishing stock of

champagne at the bar and the couple, rooting about in the cellar among the fresh supplies which Sebastian must at any moment come to collect. When Alicia realises she is being poisoned, the coffee cup is shot to dominate the frame, dwarfing the unfortunate heroine.

When Hitchcock first had the idea for *Notorious* in 1944, he had decided to make his Nazis interested in smuggling uranium for a secret weapon. He made official inquiries as to how uranium could be incorporated in an atomic bomb. There was a horrified reaction—but he was assured that such a project was quite unfeasible. In the next few weeks he was closely scrutinised by the F.B.I.

Bergman and Grant find uranium in the wine cellar

The Paradine Case was the last film to be made under the Selznick seven-year contract and was the poorest of Hitchcock's Hollywood career. It was a slow, ponderously enacted courtroom drama. A beautiful woman, Valli, is on trial for the poisoning of her husband. An unhappily married barrister, played by Gregory Peck, defends her and becomes infatuated. In attempting to prove her innocence he meets the curious valet, Louis Jourdan, who later turns out to have been the prisoner's lover. Charles Laughton played a cruel judge with characteristic gusto, but the film was dead. Hitchcock was worried by Jourdan's casting—he would have preferred a rougher actor in the part. The intention was to show that Valli's nymphomania would cause her even to take a servant.

Prison visiting in opera dress—from **The Paradine Case**

Hitchcock with Valli

Valli in cell confides with her counsel, Gregory Peck

Farley Granger and John Dall as murderers in **Rope**. The chest contains the body

Opposite: Farley Granger struggles with James Stewart

In 1948 Hitchcock went into partnership with Sidney Bernstein and formed a company called Transatlantic Pictures. The intention was to produce films in both Hollywood and London. The first was made at Warner Studios, Burbank, California; this was *Rope*—Hitchcock's first venture into colour. It was also shot with the ten-minute take, a technical innovation which fascinated Hitchcock at the time. The action all takes place in a penthouse apartment, observing the unities of time and place. The few cuts were mostly confined to reel changes and there were no 'opticals'—fades, dissolves, wipes and so forth. The actors rehearsed for several weeks as though preparing for a stage play. The camera followed the action as a spectator, roaming round the room and peering at details, then retreating to take in the general scene. But the ten-minute take did not work. It was a limiting use of the medium, and parts of the film are unbearably tedious.

The plot of Patrick Hamilton's play on which the film was based recalled the Leopold–Loeb murder case of the twenties. Two young men, probably homosexual, although this is implied rather than overtly stated, murder a third as a demonstration of the Nietzschian superiority over fellow man. They put the body

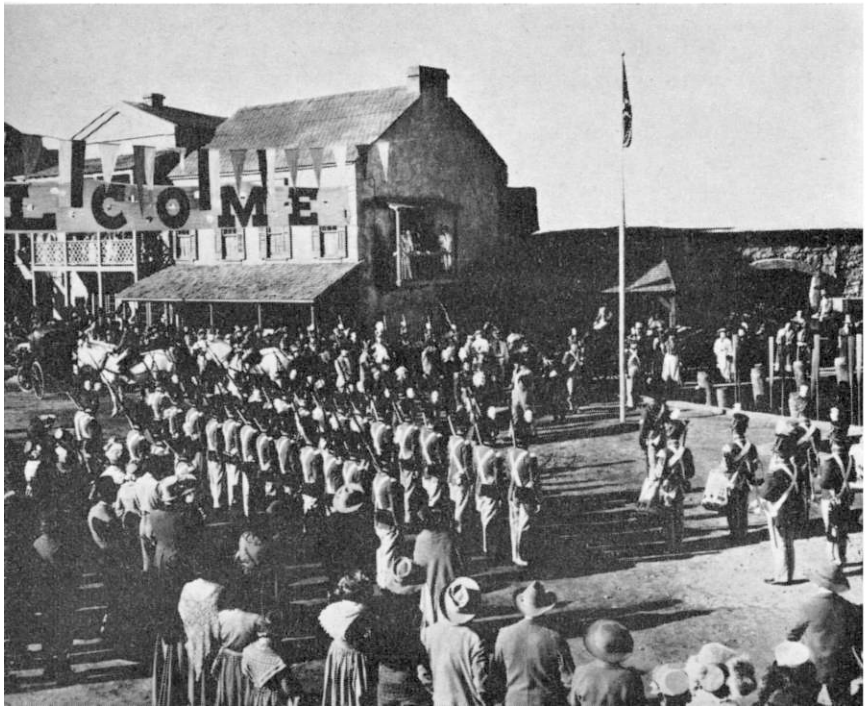
in a trunk and hold a party around it with the victim's friends and family. Later, after the guests have left, one of them, their old college professor, returns and confronts them with his suspicions. After a struggle he discovers the body and the murderers plead for his understanding. Realising that it was his own lightly spoken words that have inspired the tragedy, the professor shuffles off the blame in a curtain lecture on human values and summons the police.

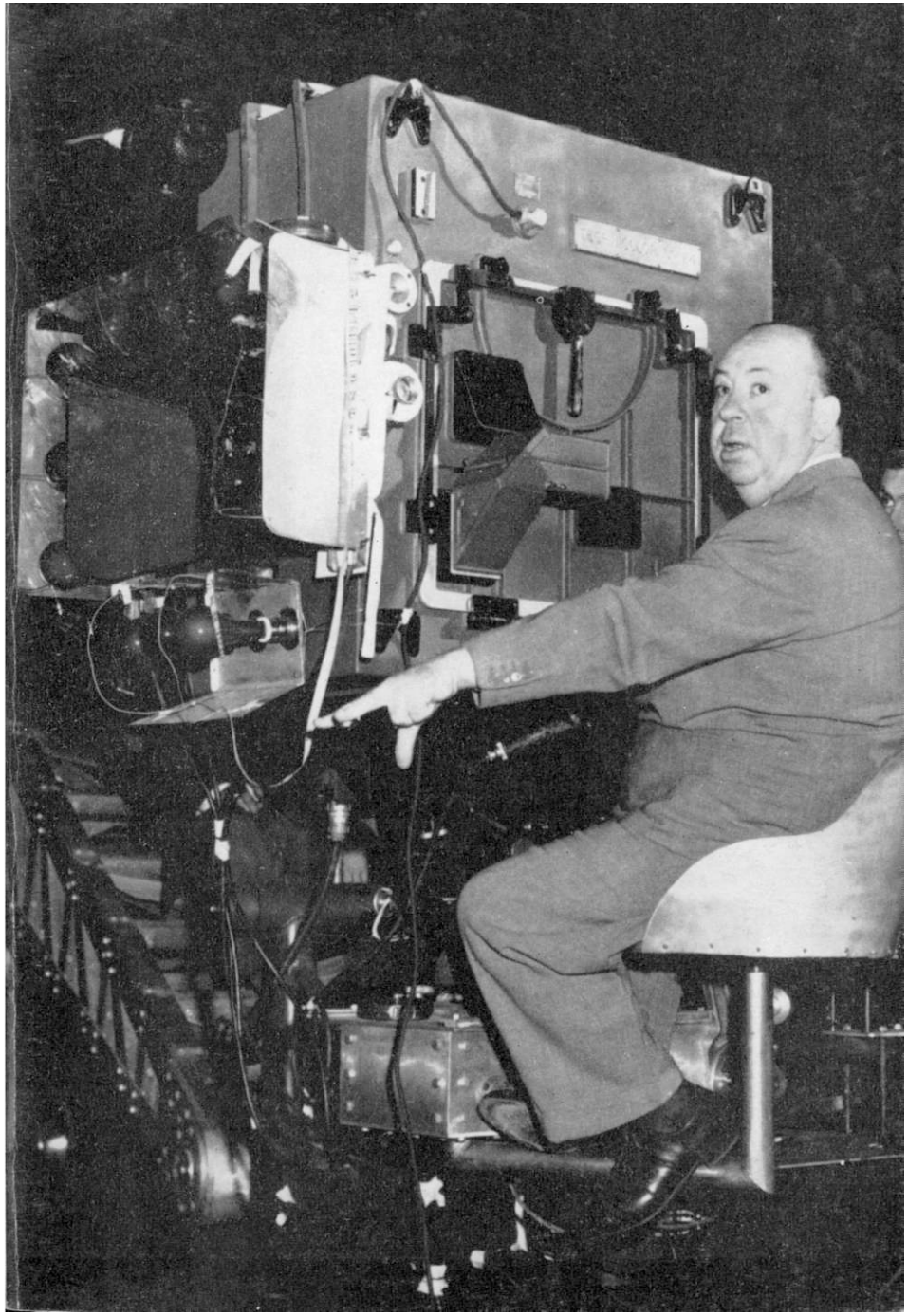
The casting of James Stewart, with greyed temples, as the professor seemed oddly lightweight, but John Dall and Farley Granger were convincing as the intellectual murderers.

Hitchcock's affair with the ten-minute take was not quite finished. It was used, but more sparingly, in *Under Capricorn* which he made in England at the M.G.M. Studios, Elstree. It was his third costume picture and was as unsatisfactory as the earlier *Waltzes from Vienna* and *Jamaica Inn*, although potentially it had

Opposite: Hitchcock with massive Technicolor camera

Official ceremony—**Under Capricorn**





the most interesting plot. Set in the first half of the nineteenth century, it concerns a stableman (Joseph Cotten) who has eloped with Lady Henrietta (Ingrid Bergman). He is blamed for the murder of her brother and transported to Australia. After his release he becomes a successful businessman, but his wife is now an alcoholic. She falls in love with her visiting cousin (Michael Wilding) and confesses that it was she who killed her brother. In a fight with the husband the cousin is wounded, and Henrietta makes her confession public so that her husband won't be hanged. In spite of Jack Cardiff's colour photography, the film was slow and dull. Yet it is admired by French critics.

Opposite: Hitchcock and Bergman sightseeing at the Tower of London

Kitchen scene, **Under Capricorn**: left, Margaret Leighton and Ingrid Bergman; right, Jack Watling

Then in 1950 Hitchcock made a thriller in England, *Stage Fright*. It was reminiscent in some ways of the great Gaumont-British days, but the former sparkle appeared to have gone flat with the years in Hollywood. It lasted half an hour longer than *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and seemed immeasurably slower, with the last vestiges of the ten-minute take still in evidence in some sequences. A young man (Richard Todd), suspected of murdering the husband of a musical star (Marlene Dietrich), is helped by his girl-friend at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (Jane Wyman) to evade the police. A smooth police inspector (Michael Wilding) is interested in the girl. In spite of the final, unexpected twist and the presence of several important box-office stars (Jane Wyman had just been awarded an Oscar for *Johnny Belinda*; Richard Todd had made an exciting first appearance in *The Hasty Heart*; Michael Wilding had appeared in a series of popular comedies with Anna Neagle), *Stage Fright* failed to revive a reputation tarnished by recent expensive failures.

On **Stage Fright** set with Marlene Dietrich

Dietrich as musical star in **Stage Fright**

Patricia Hitchcock, then in her early twenties, had been a student at R.A.D.A. where part of *Stage Fright* was filmed. Her father employed her in this film as a double for Jane Wyman in some of the exterior scenes.

With the completion of *Stage Fright* Hitchcock seemed to have reached the end of his first Hollywood period—ten years of hardening his craft and mastering the superior production values now available to him. On the credit side he had made *Rebecca*, *Foreign Correspondent*, the matchless *Shadow of a Doubt* and *Notorious*; he had also made the brave failures *Lifeboat*, *Rope* and *Under Capricorn*, the negative *Mr and Mrs Smith*, *Suspicion*, *Saboteur*, *Spellbound* and *Stage Fright*, and the appalling *The Paradine Case*. He was now fifty-one and had been directing films for a quarter of a century. Yet, far from being played out, his fullest and richest creativity was still to come.

Alastair Sim and Jane Wyman in **Stage Fright**

Hitchcock at RADA

The fatal first meeting: Farley Granger, Robert Walker, **Strangers on a Train**

Mature Hitchcock: 1951 and after

In 1951 Hitchcock exploded back to the height of his power with *Strangers on a Train*. His script from Patricia Highsmith's novel had been carefully worked out by Raymond Chandler, Czenzi Ormonde and Whitfield Cook, and the film was photographed by Robert Burks, the beginning of a long association that has continued with only one interruption (*Psycho*) ever since.

Bruno, a wealthy, talkative young man (Robert Walker), buttonholes a famous tennis player, Guy (Farley Granger), on a train. He outlines a scheme in which Guy murders Bruno's hated father and Bruno murders Guy's wife, who is the main obstacle to his marriage with a Senator's daughter. Guy regards Bruno as an amiable crank and dismisses the conversation, but to his horror he finds a day or two later that Bruno has indeed murdered his wife and it is now his turn to complete the deal. Horrified, he backs down, and Bruno sets out to incriminate him by planting his cigarette lighter at the scene of the crime. Guy has to win a tennis match, evade the police and dash out to the small town where the murder took place, to stop Bruno.

Hitchcock's most successful films always seem to be the ones where real locations are used—the basic sense of geography and the wanderlust in his make-up come through in many of the pre-war films even when for financial reasons the studio was used to recreate the atmosphere. Many of the first Hollywood films (except *Shadow of a Doubt* which was shot mainly on location) lost this feeling of *genius loci* and floated in the limbo world of Hollywood phoneyness. But *Strangers on a Train* used real locations, and used them well, as integral parts of the story's development. The backgrounds are completely realistic and believable—the music shop where Guy argues with his impossible wife, the fairground and the island where Bruno kills her, the Washington diplomatic party, the tennis ground and the big trains thundering between New York and Washington.

Opposite: the murder, **Strangers on a Train**

Leo G. Carroll, Farley Granger, Ruth Roman and Patricia Hitchcock

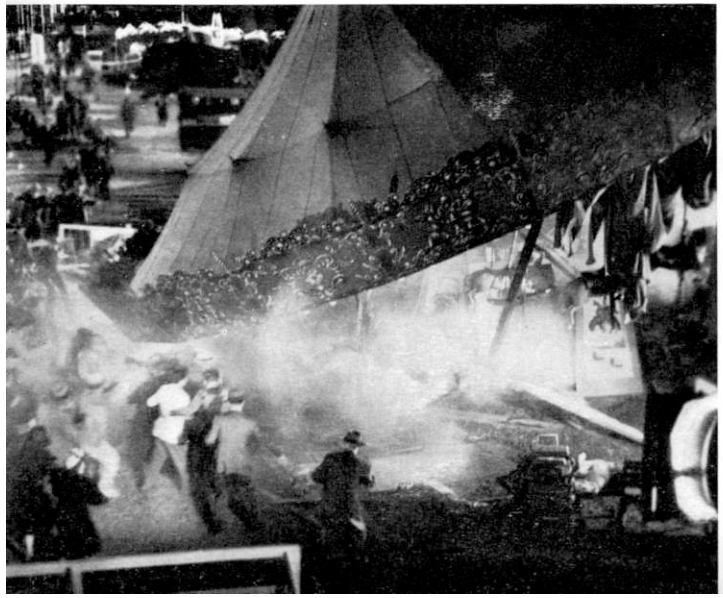
The film is rich in Hitchcock detail—the murder itself reflected in the victim's fallen glasses; a nodding tennis crowd with one stationary head—Bruno—smiling at the player; the brilliant build-up of tension by skilful cross-cutting between Guy fighting to win his match and Bruno, many miles away, struggling to retrieve the incriminating lighter which has fallen down a drain. The final sequence, which required a great deal of patience in shooting, is a fight between Walker and Granger on a merry-go-round which has run amok and is whirling at tremendous speed. Eventually someone manages to stop the machinery, and the whole thing spectacularly collapses in a pile of exhausted wreckage.

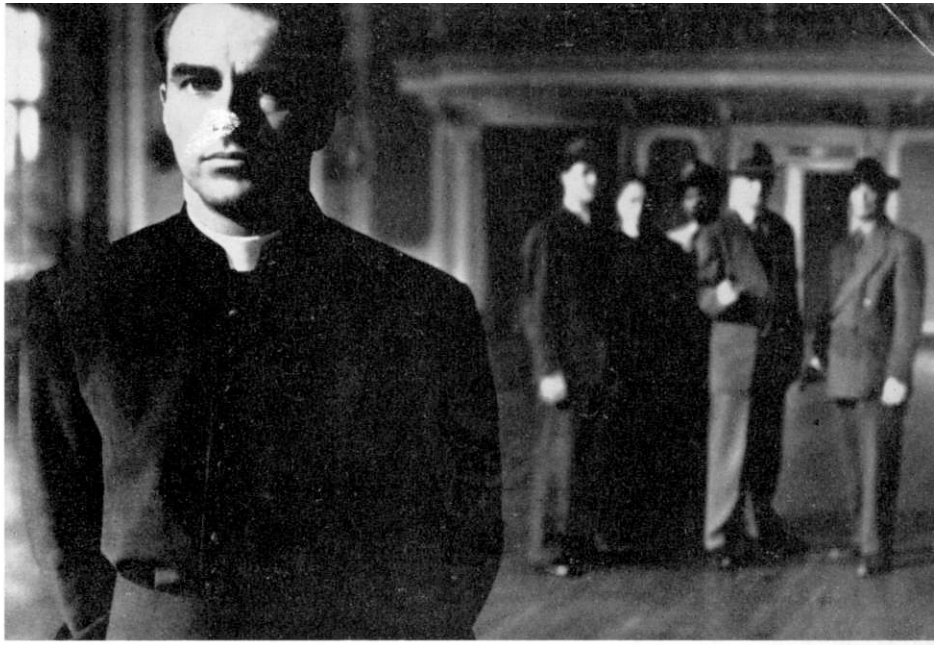
Once again the transference of guilt theme is used; Guy feels guilty firstly because he wanted his wife dead, and secondly, because he is afraid to go through with his part of the bargain. Ironically, at the end of the film he is free to marry, and the tragic Bruno has in fact done him a good turn.

Transference of guilt is also present in *I Confess*, filmed on location in the city of Quebec. Montgomery Clift plays a priest who hears a confession from a murderer and then finds himself

Opposite: Robert Walker demonstrates strangulation

Collapse of the carousel, **Strangers on a Train**





Montgomery Clift moves forward under police cover to tackle a murderer

Opposite: Anne Baxter in **I Confess**

accused of the crime. His vows will not enable him to incriminate the real murderer. The murdered man was a blackmailer—his victim, an M.P.'s wife who was Clift's girl before he was ordained and who still loves him. Since the identity of the murderer is known from the start, the suspense situation derives from the moral dilemma faced by the priest and his way of solving it. Anne Baxter is out of character as the girl; nearly everyone else seems to be a convincing Quebecois. Anita Bjork, the Swedish star of *Miss Julie*, was to have played the part. But the story is that she arrived with illegitimate child and lover; Warners, horrified, hastily substituted Anne Baxter who was then available. Certainly Hitchcock was unhappy working with Montgomery Clift and has never cared for 'the Method', since it led to a degree of introspection by the actor with his role which was beyond the control of the director. Visually, the film was full of exciting images and Quebec's dramatic architecture was used to full effect. There was a particularly attractive flashback sequence of the love affair.

Dial M for Murder was a straightforward adaptation by Frederick Knott of his stage play. It was shot in colour and 3-D, although by the time it was finished the vogue was over and it was released as a normal flat film. Hitchcock resisted the temptation to 'open up' the play—only two scenes as far as I can remember were shot outside the small London flat. It was another murder plot, a former tennis champion (Ray Milland) conspiring to kill his rich wife (Grace Kelly). When his accomplice is killed in the attempt, he ingeniously changes his plan to ensure that she is arrested and condemned. On the eve of her execution a sharp police officer and her lover discover the truth. There is a great deal of cat-and-mouse dialogue and a long overhead shot during the exposition of the murder plan. Hitchcock said that he made this film to play safe while recharging his creative batteries. It is successful within these terms.

Hitchcock's appearance in **Dial M for Murder** as reunion guest in picture on wall of apartment (he is at left of right-hand table)

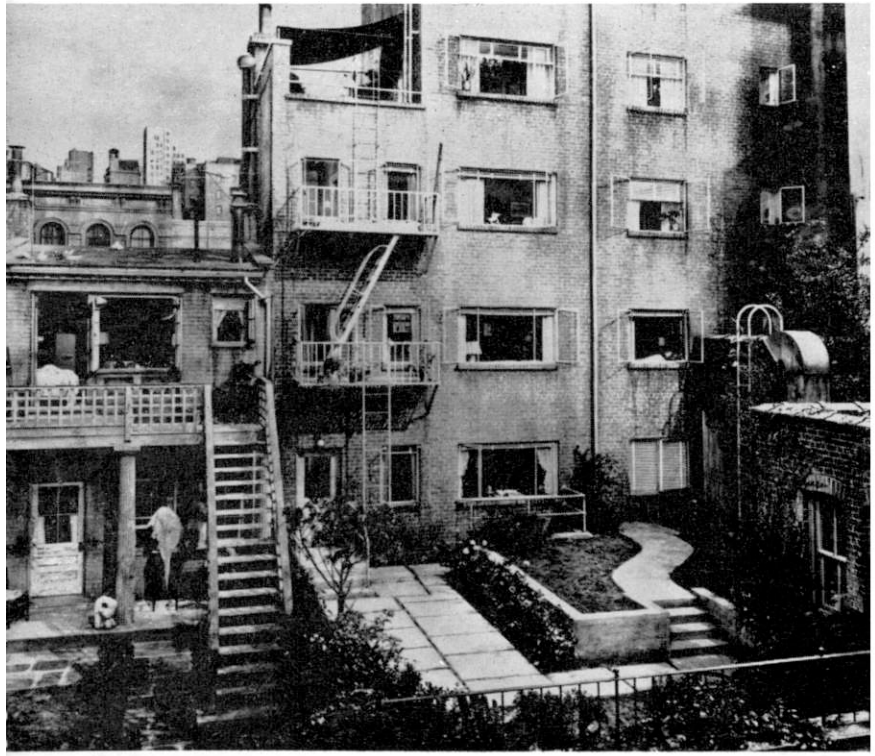
Grace Kelly attacked by Anthony Dawson in **Dial M for Murder**

Grace Kelly and Ray Milland with corpse of attacker

His next four films were made at Paramount, the company he had joined in his youth as a title designer (when it was called Famous Players-Lasky). For *Rear Window* he placed another severe physical limitation on his action. The camera remains throughout (except inexplicably for one shot) in the apartment of a photographic journalist recovering from a broken leg. Outside his window is a Greenwich Village courtyard overlooked by other apartments. During his enforced idleness this man of action takes to peering at his neighbours through his many lenses. He suspects that one of them has murdered his wife and with difficulty manages to convince his voguish fiancée and the insurance company nurse. Eventually the murderer comes to his apartment and tries to carry out a second murder.

Opposite: James Stewart and long lens

The courtyard set of **Rear Window**



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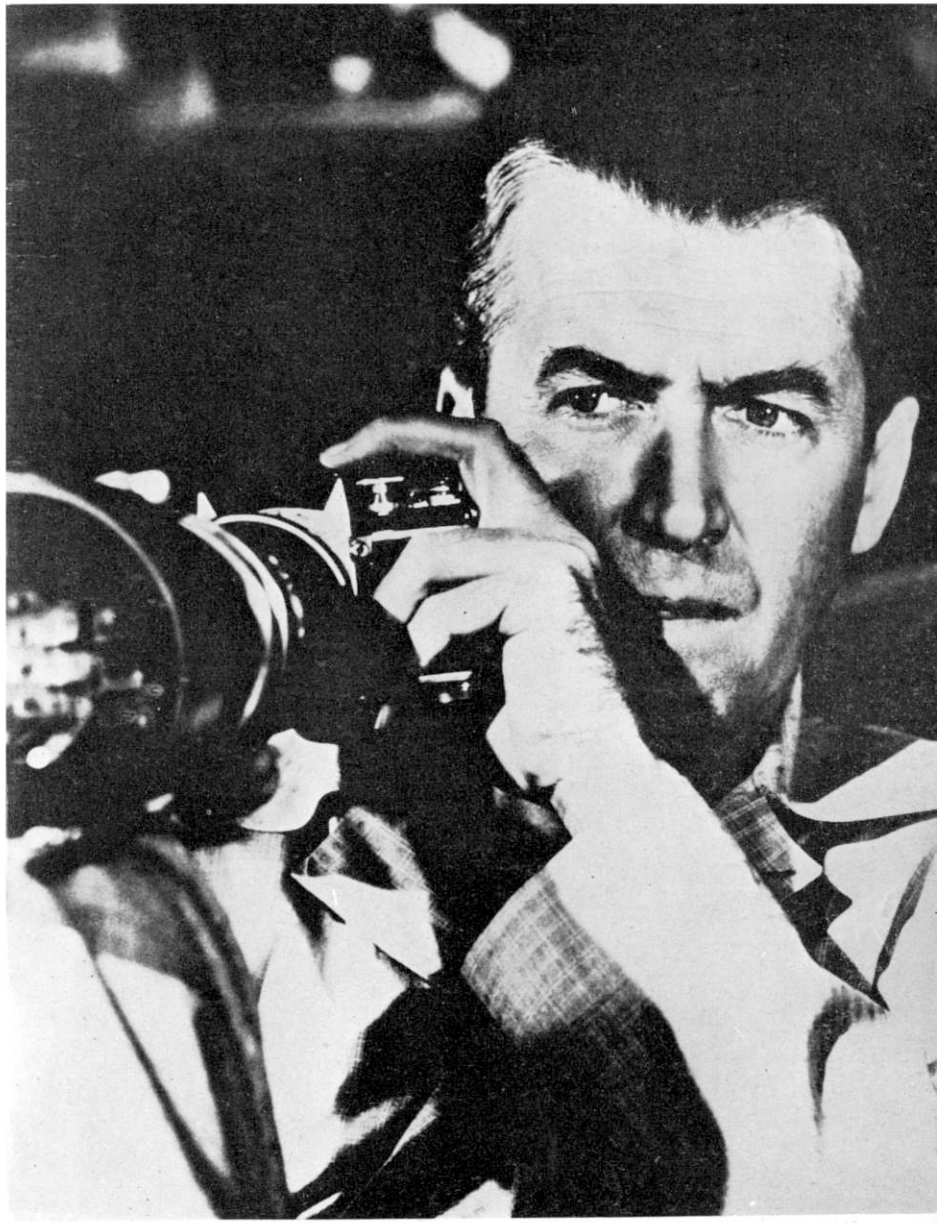

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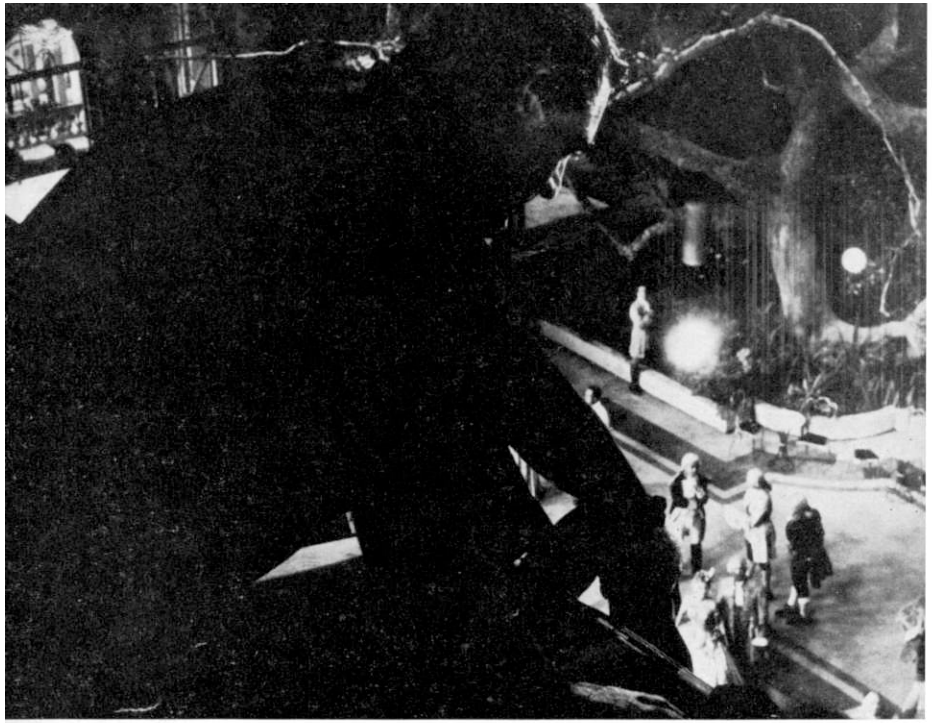
It was excellently cast, with James Stewart, Grace Kelly and Thelma Ritter, and Raymond Burr as Thorwald, the murderer. The film has a disturbing tone not confined to its basic *voyeuriste* premise. Stewart, carefully observing each neighbour, assigns each a role—the lonely spinster, entertaining non-existent admirers, the newly-weds, the composer and his charmed circle, the free-wheeling dancing girl, the woman artist. Thorwald at first becomes a wife-murderer as part of an intellectual fantasy—this is the role he has been given because he fits the part. It is as though Stewart is willing him to be a murderer; consequently, part of the culpability is on him. Hitchcock's black humour prevails, and the hero expiates his guilt at the end of the film by having the other leg broken. None of Hitchcock's films has demonstrated so clearly as this the director's involvement as puppet-master of ordinary mortals.

Opposite: Hitchcock in London, 1955

Below: view across the court, **Rear Window**. James Stewart, Grace Kelly, Thelma Ritter

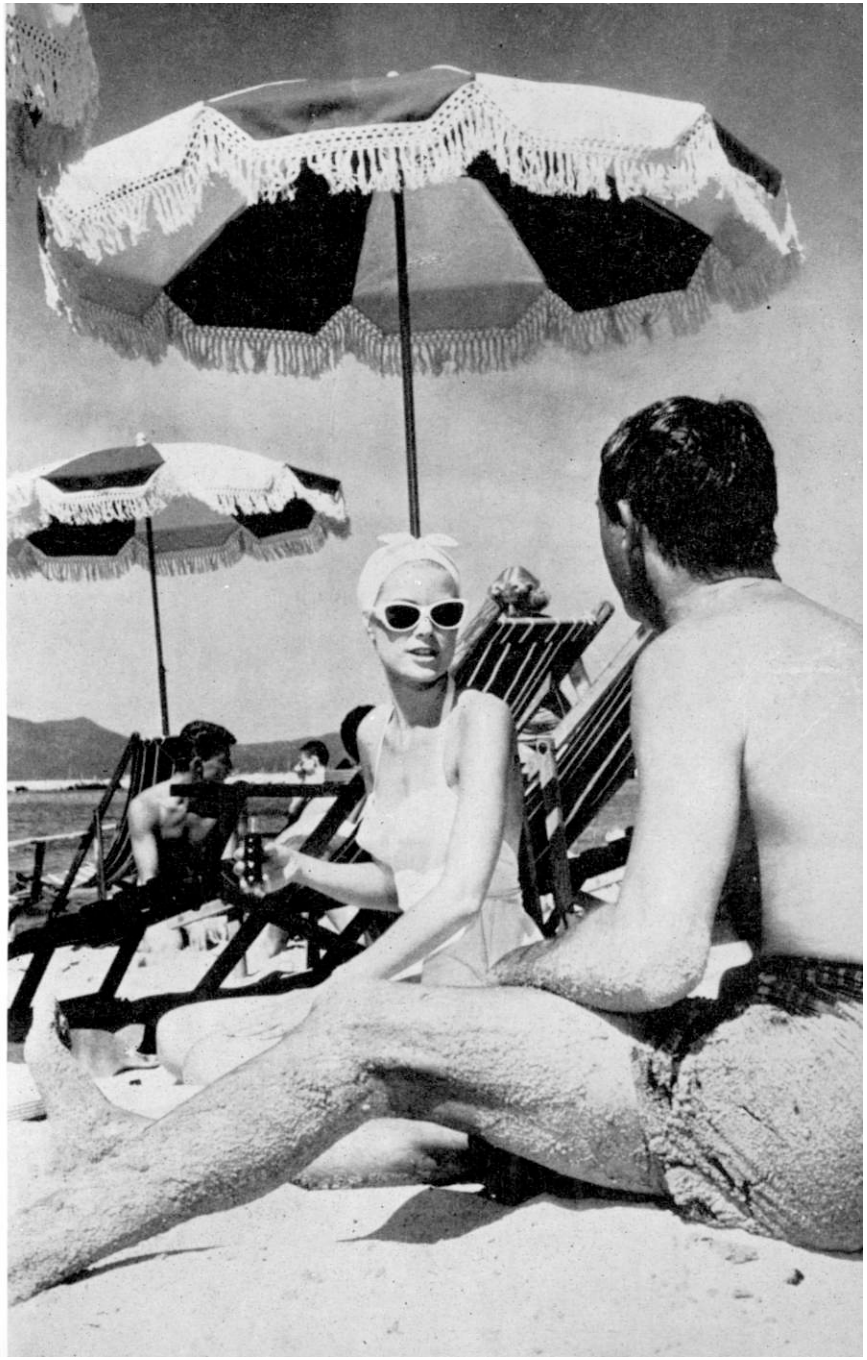


Rooftop survey, **To Catch a Thief**

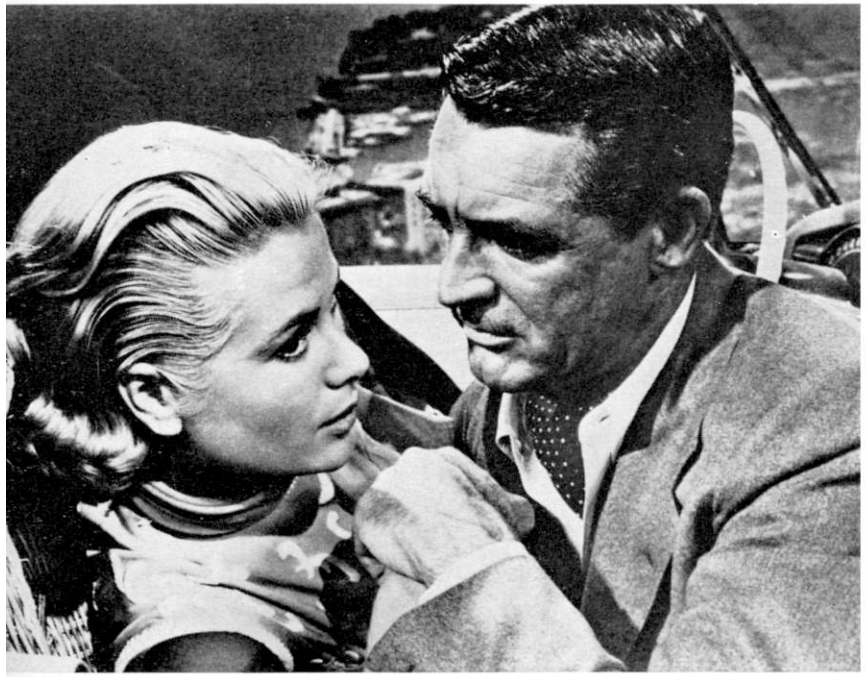
Opposite: Grace Kelly, Cary Grant on the beach

One of the outward signs of Hitchcock's new, zestful approach to his work was the remarkable diminution of his large frame. At worst his weight had reached twenty-one stone, but with careful dieting and exercise he had by 1955 managed to reduce to thirteen stone, a physical improvement which added much in vitality. He now takes injections to prevent overweight; these have the effect of eliminating excess fluids.

In 1955 Cary Grant and Grace Kelly, by then Hitchcock's favourite actress, appeared in the colourful comedy thriller *To Catch a Thief*. The inevitable chase, shot from above from a helicopter, was now in high-performance cars along the south of France Corniche. Grant is a retired jewel thief, suspected when an imposter copies his methods; Kelly an ice-cool American girl (with a diamond-encrusted mother in tow), excited and attracted by the thought that he could be the thief. The imposter is



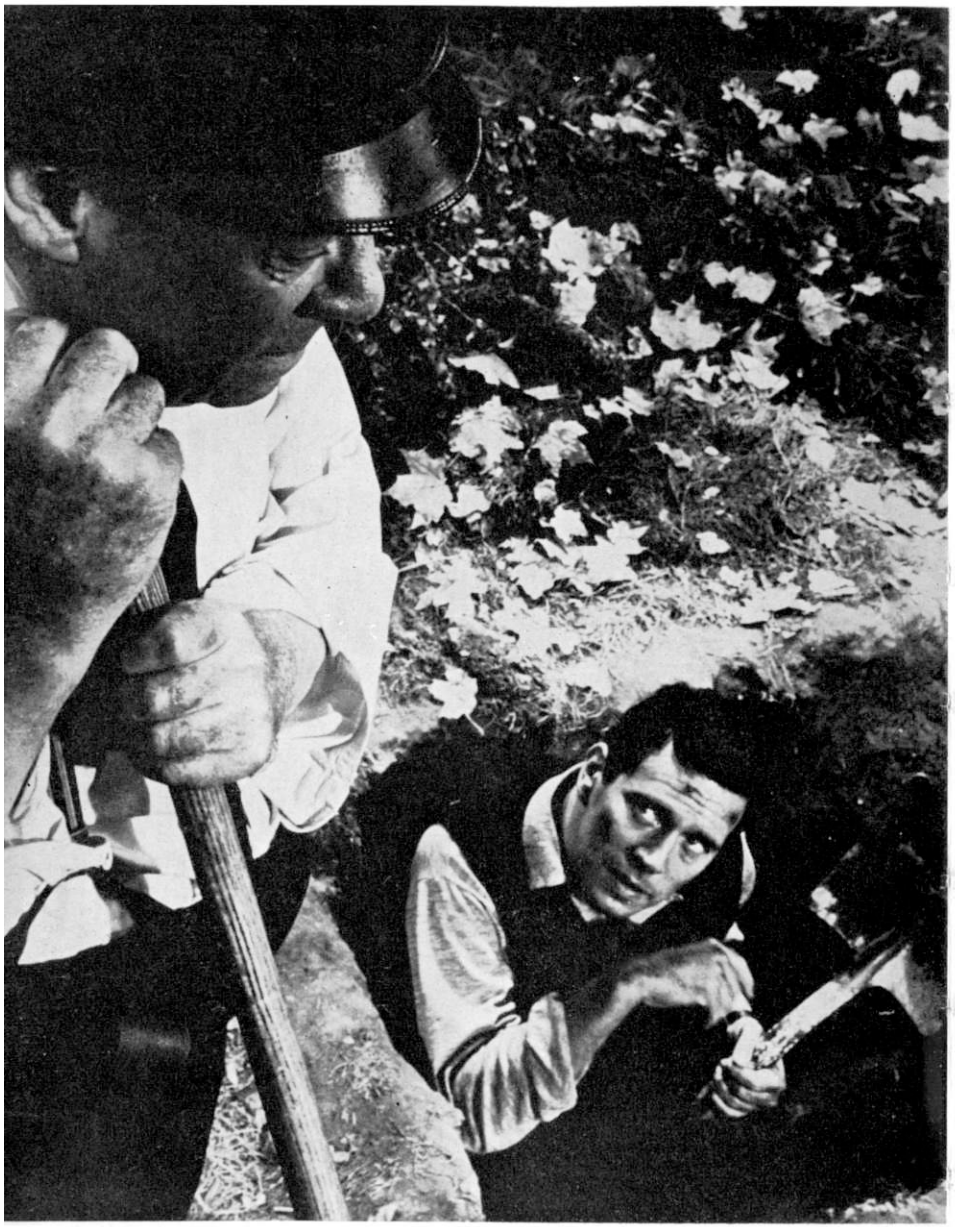
Romantic moment, Grace Kelly, Cary Grant



unmasked in a rooftop struggle after a costume ball. The intricate plot is sown with false trails and red herrings—Hitchcock's customary jokes at the expense of the audience. One revolting moment occurs when the vulgar mother, excellently played by Jessie Royce Landis, grinds a cigarette out in a fried egg. *To Catch a Thief* was another change of mood and offered beautiful Riviera scenery, sophisticated comedy acting and an element of mystery. Grace Kelly, in her last Hitchcock film, cleverly portrayed the sexual heat lurking under the iceberg exterior of the heroine.

In 1955 Hitchcock started a television series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. This consisted of weekly half-hour playlets of a suspense type. Hitchcock himself was executive producer, overseeing the scripts and productions. Joan Harrison, who started as

Fancy dress ball, **To Catch a Thief**



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his secretary in the 1930s, was his senior producer. Some of the teleplays were directed by Hitchcock himself, although he has never done more than three in one year. The programme was later lengthened to fill a one-hour slot and some have been in colour. The television films are usually made in three days shooting and Hitchcock finds the change of discipline refreshing. He introduces each show himself in a characteristic manner; when he wanted to give the writer of the introductions an idea of the kind of mood he wished to generate for the short prologues, he ran the film *The Trouble With Harry*.

This is probably his best exercise in black comedy. Harry is already dead at the start of the picture. His corpse is discovered, disposed of, rediscovered, reinterred several times in the course of an autumn day in rural Vermont. Practically everyone in the small

Opposite: Edmund Gwenn and John Forsythe

Corpse in the bath—Jerry Mathers, Shirley MacLaine and Royal Dano in **The Trouble With Harry**

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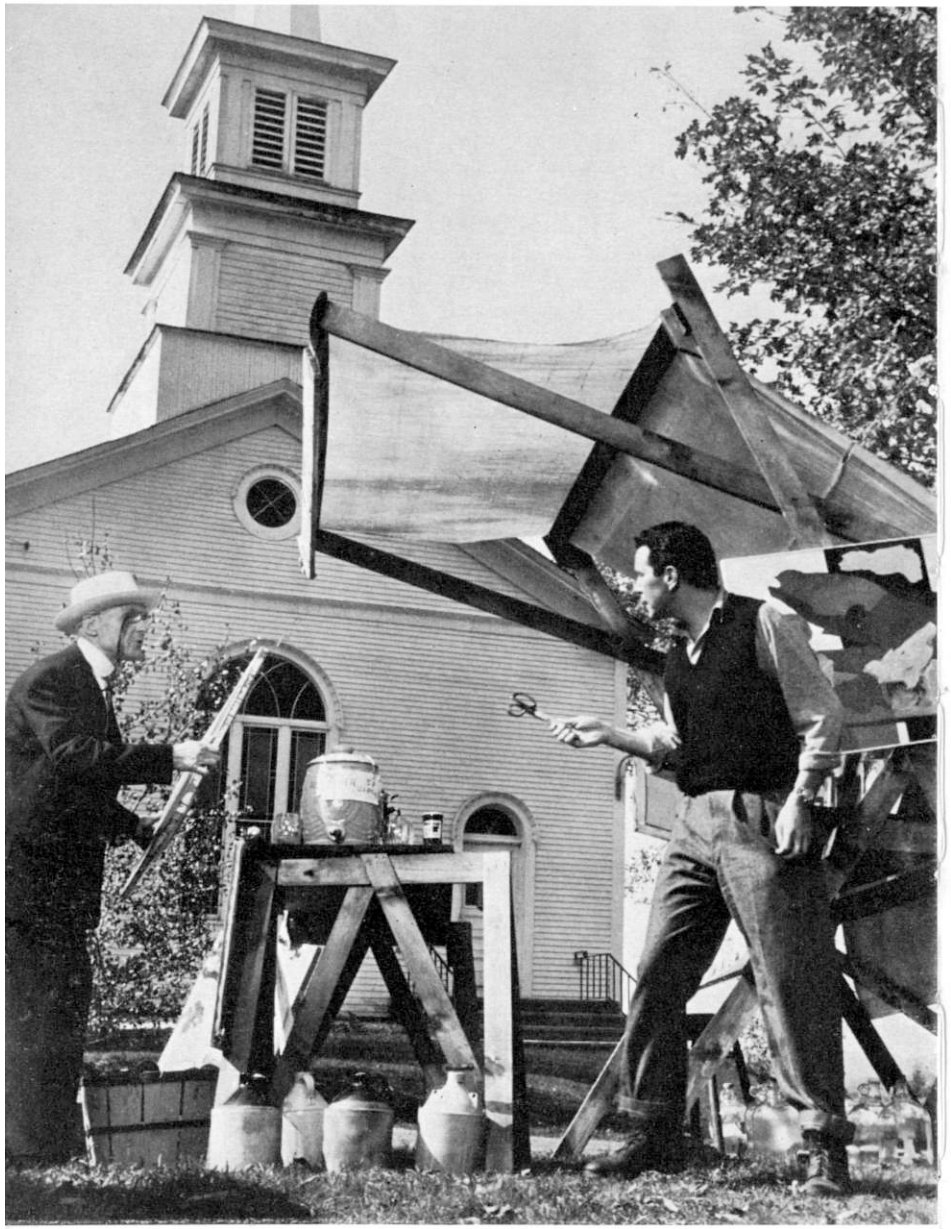
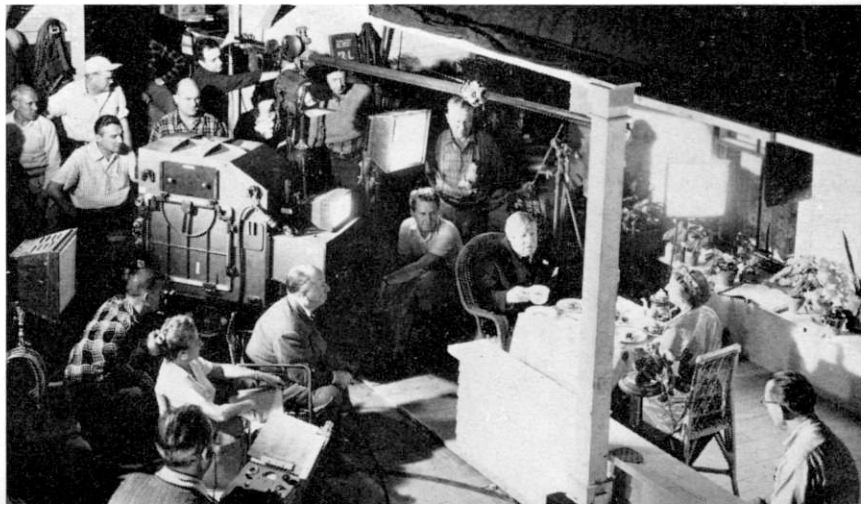


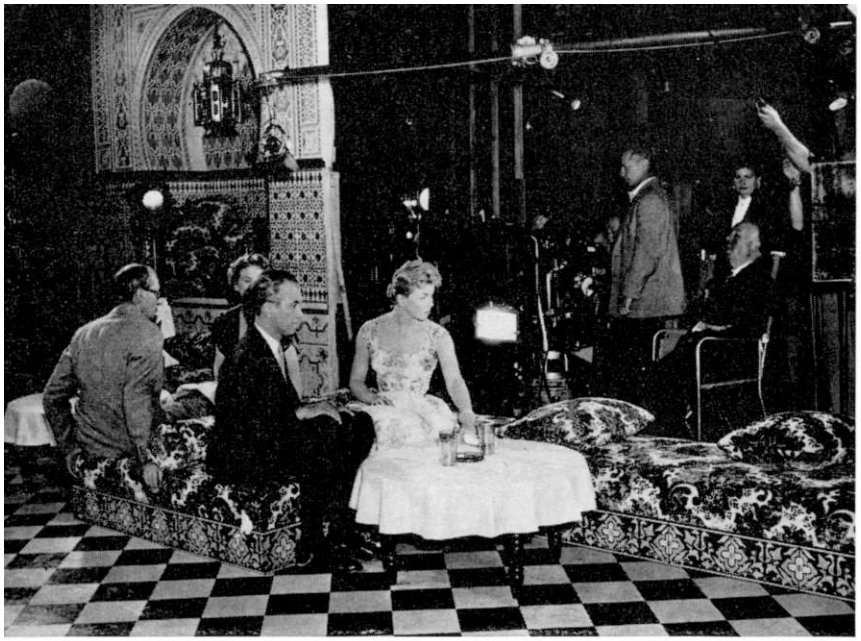
community seems to have had something to do with Harry—first a retired sea-captain out shooting who thinks that he has shot him, then a middle-aged spinster who had hit Harry when he tried to assault her, then Harry's estranged wife who had brought a milk bottle down on his head when he turned up at her house. Harry's vivid socks or bare feet seem to dominate each scene—the corpse is an inanimate prop that constantly reappears and is almost taken for granted. People trip over him, draw him, make assignations over him. The brilliant hues of a New England autumn are a ludicrously unlikely backdrop for murder, and the twist in the tail reveals that each suspect, who without question assumes the guilt, has assumed wrongly. One of Hitchcock's immortal lines comes in this film—Mildred Natwick, the fading spinster, encountering a puffy-faced Edmund Gwenn dragging the corpse across the ground by the legs, observes, 'What seems to be the trouble, Captain?'

The Trouble With Harry turned out to be a *succès d'estime*. In spite of favourable notices from the critics it did poorly at the box-office, to Hitchcock's bitter disappointment, for it was a film of which he is very fond. It has the elements of macabre humour, death in an unexpected setting, acceptance of an outrageous situation and a winking partnership with the audience which greatly appeals to him.

Opposite: Vermont locations, fall colours

Directing **The Trouble With Harry**





On set, **The Man Who Knew Too Much**

His next film was a remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. The 1934 version was virtually unknown outside Britain, and Hitchcock felt that it had the most attractive sentimental elements for American audiences. He also needed to find a vehicle for James Stewart quickly, and so he put him in the old Leslie Banks role. The new version, in colour and VistaVision, lasted for 120 minutes against the 75 minutes of the earlier film. In spite of this, two of the most effective sequences were not included, the dentist episode and the scene based on the Sidney Street siege. Hitchcock attempted to inject into the story a logical form missing in the original—audiences, he felt, were no longer prepared to accept the rapid changes of situation without adequate explanation. He moved the opening scenes with the assassination of the secret agent from Switzerland to Morocco, with the victim falling into James Stewart's arms and muttering the undesirable information before expiring in the middle of the market-place at Marrakesh.

Murder in the Casbah. Bernard Miles, Brenda de Banzie, Doris Day, James Stewart

Albert Hall scene, 1956 style

Opposite: Hitchcock on London location of **The Man Who Knew Too Much**

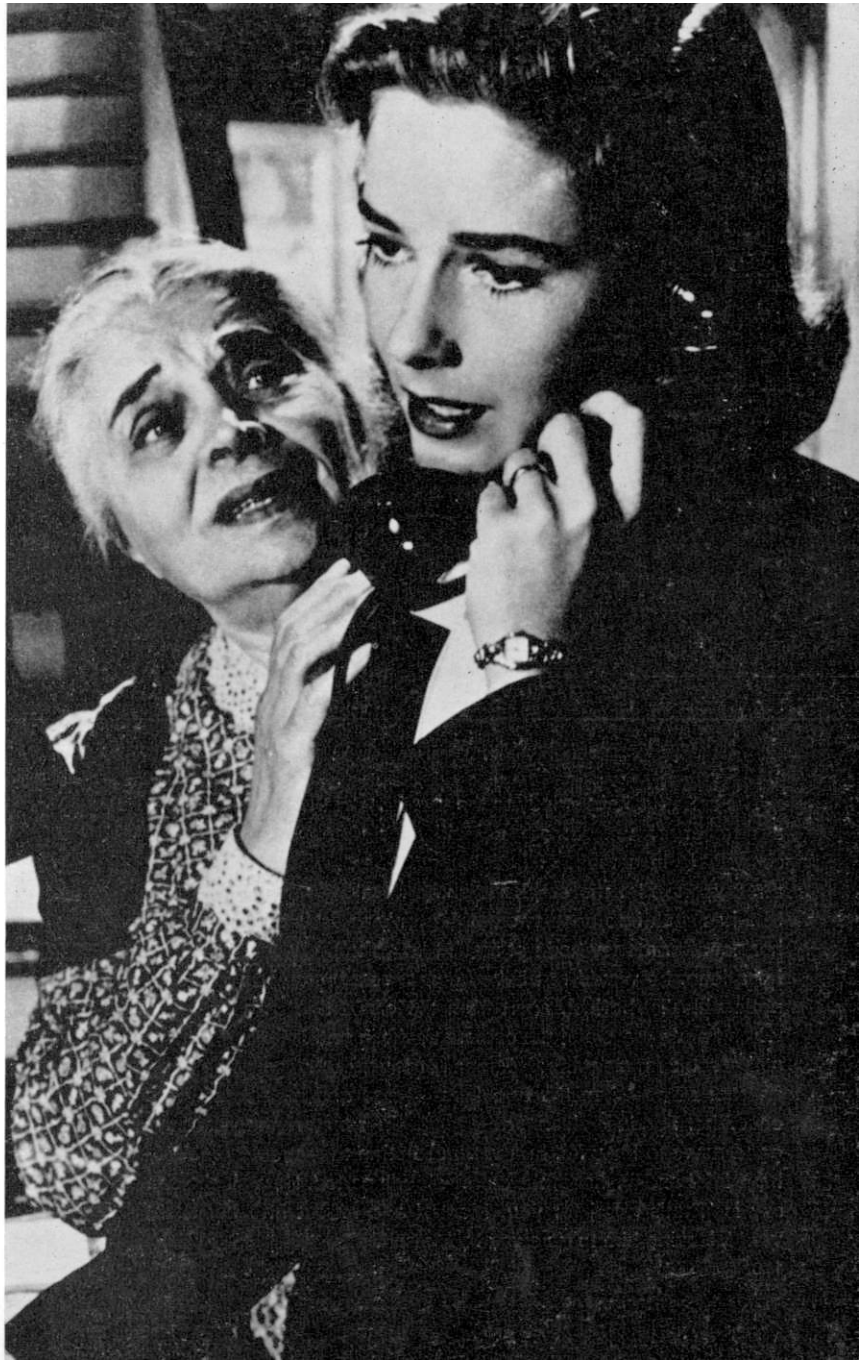
The kidnapped child was changed to a small boy and Doris Day was cast as the mother, no longer a markswoman but a retired musical comedy actress. This gave her the opportunity to perform a dreary song hit 'Que Sera Sera' (Whatever will be, will be) which further filled out the action. Her performance as the grief-stricken mother was, however, by no means inferior.

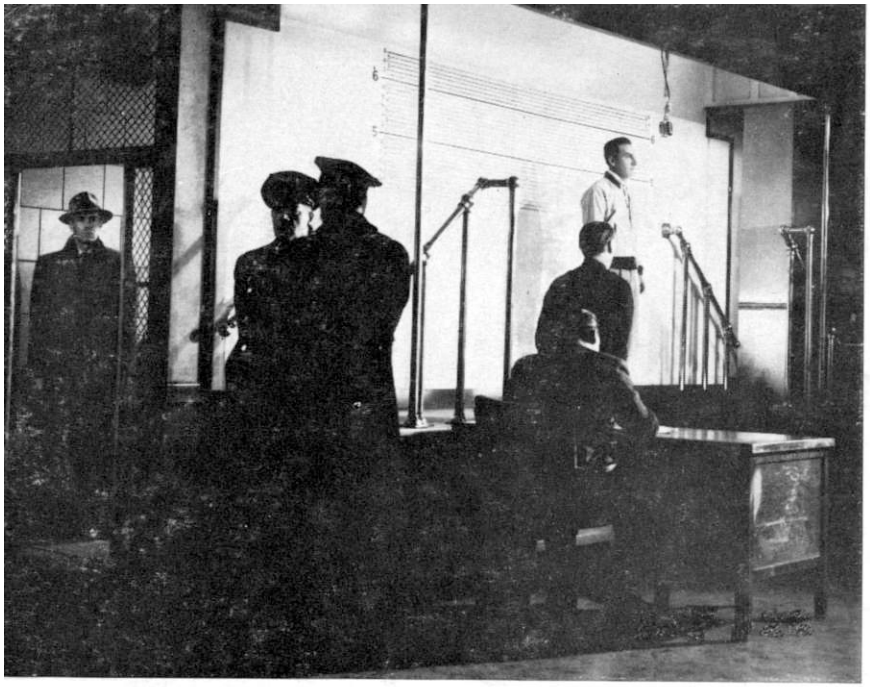
The remake, with the script of Charles Bennett and D. B. Wyndham-Lewis reworked by John Michael Hayes and Angus McPhail, lost the spontaneous excitement of the first. This was particularly noticeable in the Albert Hall scene, where a much more convincing red-plush setting tended to reduce the dramatic situation while gaining in visual effect. The shifting of the assassin's victim in his seat to present unconsciously a better target was an almost expected cliché. Undoubtedly the film suffered from comparison; it would have been interesting to know how it would have been received if there had not been a much-loved earlier version. In any case, the 1956 film was a box-office success all over the world, and plainly satisfied audiences, if not critics.

With *The Wrong Man* Hitchcock ventured into the area of the semi-documentary. The film was based on the true experience of an honest, hard-working musician who was arrested and thrown into jail in the mistaken belief that he was a hold-up man. Henry Fonda played Manny Balestrero and Vera Miles his wife, who goes insane during the period he is awaiting trial. Hitchcock used the actual locations in and around New York City which were backgrounds to the original incidents four years earlier. The police stations and jail in the film are real. The director's lifelong fear of the police emerges in his fascination with the routine procedures of arrest, the form-filling, the finger-printing, the handcuffing, the unconvincing amiability of the detectives in their questioning, their repetitious use of the Christian name their victim never uses, the mechanical staging of an identification parade. For the innocent victim all this is a Kafkaesque nightmare, and it was clearly Hitchcock's intention to show that this could happen to anyone at any time.

Opposite: Vera Miles with Esther Minciotti

Henry Fonda in **The Wrong Man**

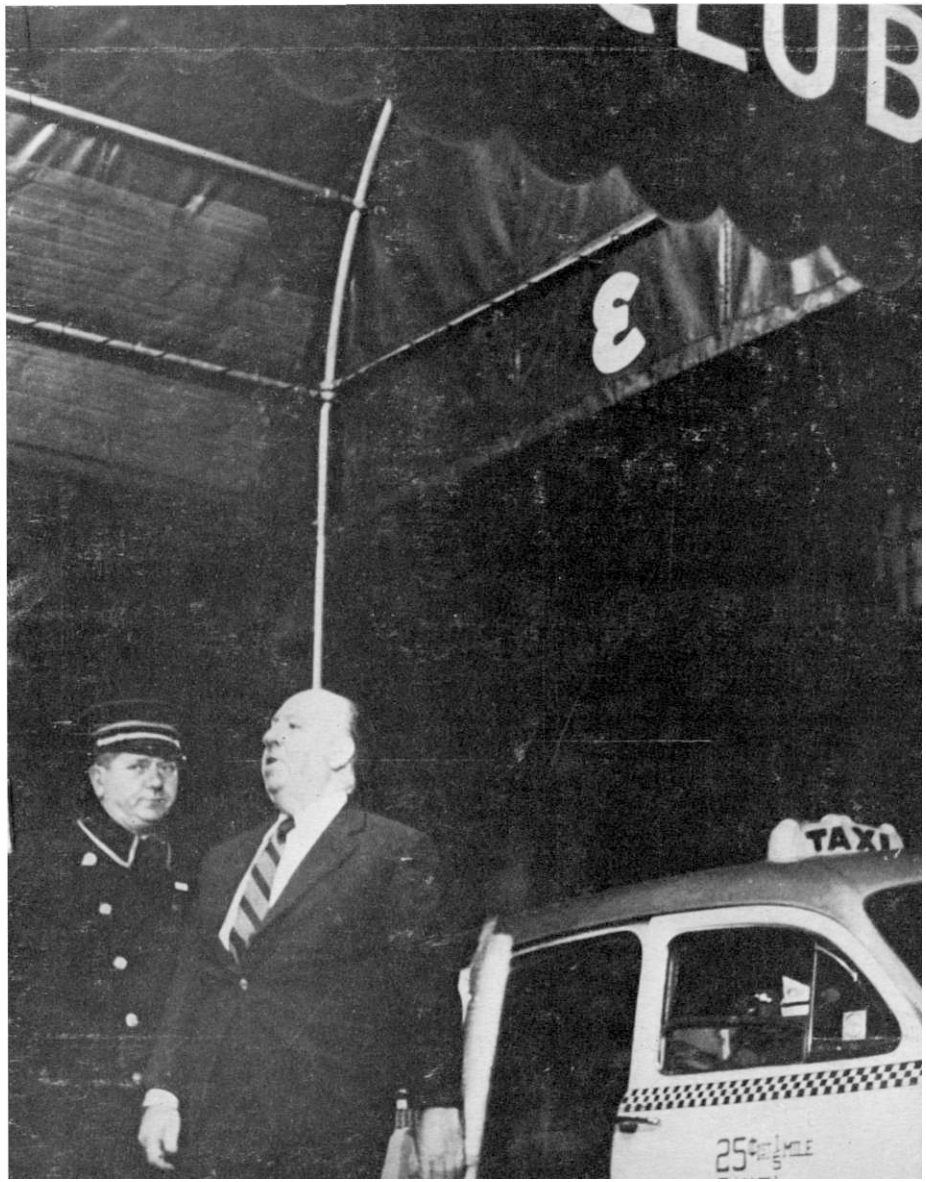




Fonda, under arrest, awaits police processing

The narrative kept strictly to the true facts of the case, including a number of unfortunate coincidences that would be hardly acceptable in a work of fiction, so that two-thirds of the way through the film the emphasis shifts from the man to his wife. She has sunk into apathy, emerging only to assume the guilt—if her need for money had not made him go to the insurance office for a loan, he would not have been arrested, etc., etc. The only noticeable 'lab' effect, apart from the credit title action, occurs when Fonda prays and the camera tracks in on his face, revealing at that same moment the *right* man in the very act of contemplating another crime—then the two faces merge and momentarily are one. After Fonda is cleared he goes to the sanatorium to pass the good news to his wife. In a work of fiction they would probably have left hand-in-hand, the storm-clouds parted. Here all she can say is 'That's good for you, Manny' and retreat into her silent world, leaving him to go away by himself.

Hitchcock cut this shot of himself from **The Wrong Man**, appeared in a prologue instead

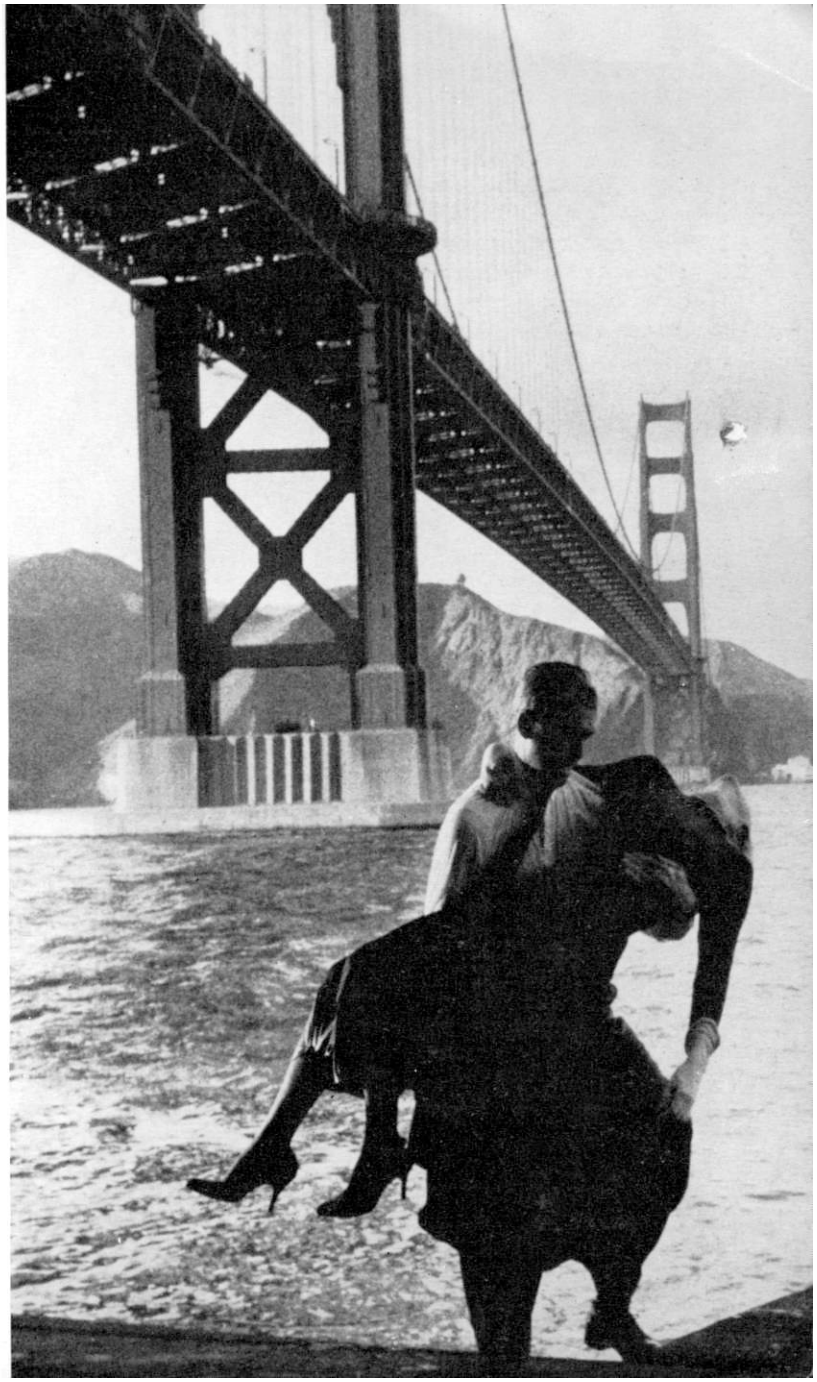


Next follows one of Hitchcock's most interesting films, *Vertigo*. The plot was taken from a novel, *D'Entre les Morts*, by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac, who had previously given Clouzot the theme for his macabre *Les Diaboliques*. James Stewart is a detective unable to stand heights after an accident. Assigned by an old college friend to follow his suicidal wife, suffering from a reincarnation complex, he rescues her from drowning and they fall in love. They visit an old Californian mission together; the girl runs up the tower—he is unable to go after her because of his affliction—and she falls to her death. Months later he sees a girl in the street who resembles her, even though her personality and appearance are quite different. After getting to know her, he persuades her to dress and style her hair to resemble the first girl. But already a flashback has shown the audience that an extraordinary murder plan was carried out. Hitchcock was criticised for revealing the secret of the plot two-thirds of the way through the film, but it seemed that he was less concerned with it being a straightforward suspense story, more interested in the effect of the obsessive and deliberate re-creation of the dead girl by the detective.

Opposite: Hitchcock with Kim Novak on set

Vertigo—James Stewart, Kim Novak, San Francisco

The lady wants to kill herself
Kim Novak, James Stewart, **Vertigo**



Visually the film is remarkable—sequences such as the two slow pursuits of the girl's car, swooping down San Francisco's steep hills and gliding round corners, or the aerial shot of the mission tower, the girl's body being recovered from an adjacent roof and the detective walking away from the church.

The double role of the girl was played by Kim Novak, who proved to be one of Hitchcock's least favourite actresses. On the screen at least she conveyed adequately the complexities of the character, especially in the scenes where she is a sexual object moulded to conform with the detective's wish. Curiously, Novak herself was 'made over' by Hollywood in much the same way.

Nurses and stretchers at **Vertigo** Press party

Last train journey. Eva Marie Saint, Cary Grant in **North by Northwest**

North by Northwest was a return to the *The Thirty-Nine Steps* chase theme, in this case enlarged and extended across the United States. Cary Grant was an advertising executive kidnapped in the middle of a client meeting and plunged into a series of improbable, and for the audience highly enjoyable, adventures—a killing in the U.N. building, a blonde on the Twentieth Century Limited, an aerial machine-gun attack at a deserted prairie bus-stop, and finally, a tussle with spies across the massive presidential sculptures of Mount Rushmore. It is an extravagant fantasy into which the old ingredients of the Gaumont-British Hitchcock are flung and brilliantly stirred into a glowing VistaVision and colour *tour de force*, an omnibus edition of the Master's work which at times is almost a parody. It says all he could possibly have left to say about the chase film and is a fitting final curtain.

Shot at by low-flying aircraft—Cary Grant in **North by Northwest**

Shot at by Eva Marie Saint

Ernest Lehman's script is rich in joking references: the immaculately fit adman dictating a self-addressed memo, 'Think thin'; the weary intelligence chief, asked which department he belongs to, answering 'F.B.I., C.I.A.—we're all part of the same alphabet soup'; Roger Thornhill, the hero, being questioned on his monogrammed matchbook, 'R.O.T., that's me.' 'What does the O stand for?' 'Nothing!'

Even the title is an enigmatic joke: there is no such compass point. There *is* a line in *Hamlet*: 'He is but mad north-north-west.' Perhaps there is another clue in the film when Cary Grant passes under a well-known airline's sign at Chicago airport. Could 'North by Northwest' be the headline of an airline travel ad?

The outstanding sequence in the film is the attempt on Grant's life in the middle of the empty prairie. He waits on the highway for the unknown man who is to meet him. A car drives up and a man gets out. They confront each other on either side of the road. Finally, Grant walks over. But the other man is merely waiting for the bus. As he climbs aboard he points to a crop-dusting plane in the distance and observes that there are no crops there to be dusted. As the bus sweeps off the plane turns and flies towards the solitary figure on the road. Then bullets begin to fly. By staging an episode of menace in the midst of a broad, open landscape, Hitchcock cleverly reversed the cliché of dark alleys, dim lamp-light and threatening shadows.

Climax on carved faces of Mount Rushmore

Alfred and Alma—preparing **Psycho**

Hitchcock's most ruthless manipulation of audiences to achieve macabre effects was achieved with *Psycho*, the blackest of black comedies to emerge from Hollywood. A secretary (Janet Leigh) absconds with the bankroll and goes off to join her lover. During the journey she drives through a heavy storm and decides to stop for the night at a lonely motel in the grounds of an old Victorian gothic house. The young proprietor (Anthony Perkins) feeds her and reveals that he has an ageing possessive mother and an intense interest in birds, which he stuffs as a hobby. He sees her to the cabin. Later, as she is taking a shower, she is stabbed to death through the curtain, apparently by the old woman. The son dutifully comes to mop up the appalling mess and dispose of the body. The rest of the film is devoted to unravelling the mystery behind the horrific Bates Motel. The explanation is ultimately furnished by a psychiatrist.

Janet Leigh—soon to be punished

Vera Miles, John Gavin and Anthony Perkins in **Psycho**

The director made an experiment in film logistics by having *Psycho* shot under the supervision of his television photographer, John L. Russell, in place of Robert Burks, who normally photographs Hitchcock's films. Television experience enabled some scenes to come off the floor much more rapidly than usual. The psychiatric epilogue, for example, was completed in a day. However, the very complex bathroom shower sequence took a week to shoot; television techniques could not shortcut an essentially cinematic problem.

Psycho is an outrageously brilliant film. Hitchcock's heroine is murdered less than a third of the way through the film and there is a second murder so well-timed in its execution that audiences gasped aloud in thunderstruck surprise. A detective climbs the

Hitchcock with Janet Leigh on **Psycho** set

Opposite: Anthony Perkins and gothic house

stairs in search of the grim house's secret; something is going to happen inevitably, but when? How? It comes with a ferocity and suddenness that manages to shock the senses even though it is expected.

As in *North by Northwest* Hitchcock said all he had left to say on the chase, so here he is closing the book on the Old Dark House. *Psycho* disturbed many film critics who felt that it was too much of a vicious practical joke on the audience. They had taken the film seriously—the last thing that Hitchcock had intended. He has constantly maintained that his films were made for audiences, not critics. In his view commercial success has been the mainspring for the continuing creation of new films. It has always been very satisfying to Hitchcock to succeed in evoking the same audience response in Tokyo as in Tulsa or Tooting. He has never lacked the courage to go straight to his audience and invite their complicity. And it is in this quality, the spectator's sharing of a sinister joke with the man behind the camera, that much of Hitchcock's appeal lies.

The terror of **The Birds**

Opposite: Hitchcock at northern California location

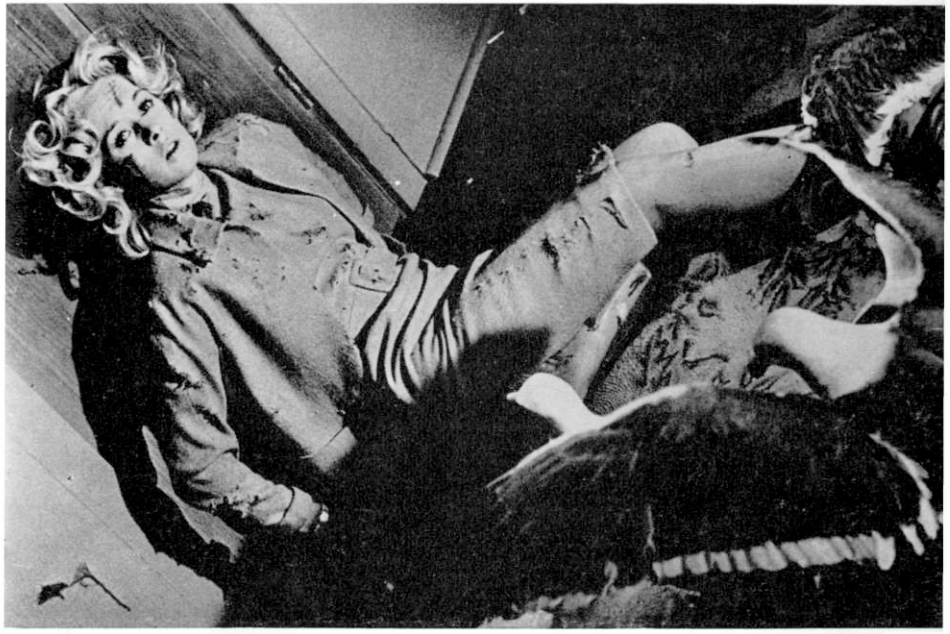
After *Psycho* there was a long hiatus in Hitchcock's output, at least as far as the cinema was concerned. A new contract for five films was signed with Universal-International. His next screen statement was the result of two years' careful planning. In 1963 *The Birds* appeared, heralded by an advertising slogan invented by Hitchcock himself: 'The birds is coming!' The story, from a Daphne du Maurier novella, hinges on one simple, frightening situation: the bird population in its numberless millions turning against man. The result was a film of compelling distinction which divided Hitchcock's critics. One said 'Disappointing on every level'; Peter Bogdanovich in his Museum of Modern Art monograph wrote: 'If he never made another motion picture in his life, *The Birds* would place him securely among the giants of the cinema.'

It opens in a casual, deceptively relaxed manner. There is a light comic encounter between a rich, bored girl and a young lawyer in a pet shop: he pretends to mistake her for the salesgirl and she capitalises on the situation. Later, attracted by him, she pursues him to his mother's cottage on the northern California coast where he spends his weekends. She meets the village schoolteacher who loves him, and his jealously possessive mother. The first moment of menace occurs when a seagull swoops and

grazes her head. The following day there is a concerted attack of birds on a children's party, and they enter the house through the chimneys and cracks in their thousands. Soon the whole community is under attack. There is a breathtaking scene in which huge ravens gather in a school playground immediately behind the unsuspecting heroine. The first time she looks there are two or three birds on the climbing bars. When she turns round again every inch of it is festooned with hundreds of menacing black shapes, sitting, waiting. There follows a tremendous wave of violence as the birds swoop down on the fishing village, tearing, pecking, clawing. The air is filled with whirling feathered bodies. An hysterical woman accuses the girl of bringing evil to Bodega Bay. Is Melanie a witch? Is this the day of judgement? Hitchcock is not supplying the answer—it is for the spectator to interpret as he wishes.

Opposite: with Suzanne Pleshette at Bodega Bay

'Tippi' Hedren, when the birds have finished with her



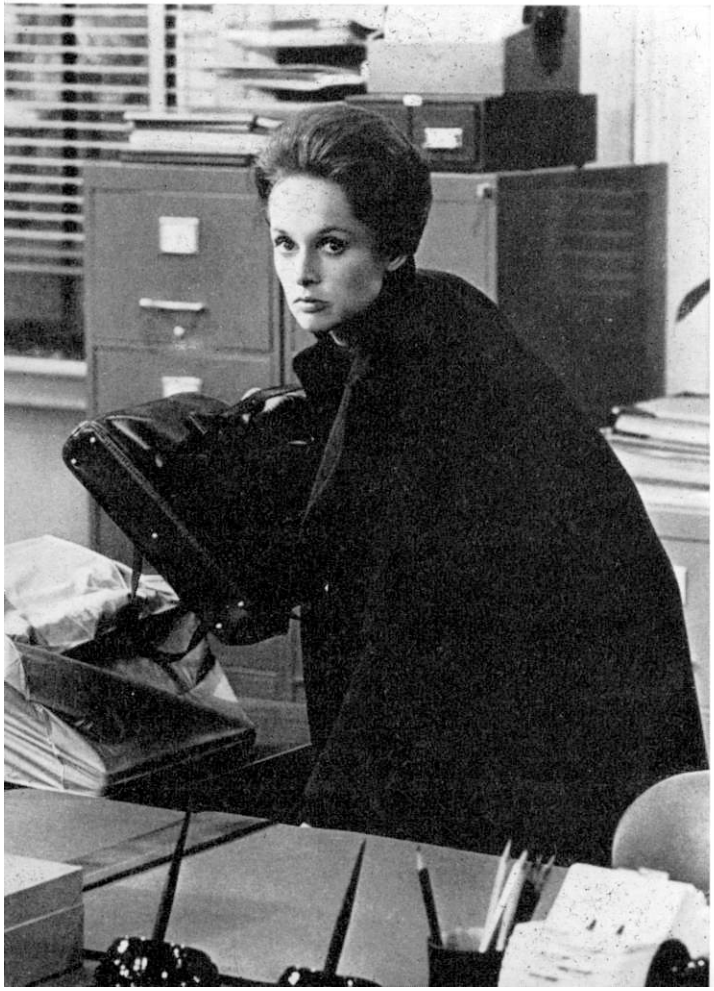
[Baldy, the actor, performing. Rod Taylor is menaced]

Baldy, off-duty, with his director

As well as being his most thought-provoking film, it is also his most elaborate technical achievement. The matte-work necessary to obtain the bird effects absorbed many months of patient special preparation. Some critics have objected to the mechanical trickery employed because it enables the birds to dominate the human actors in the picture. This surely was one of the director's intentions—to show that man could be paralysed and helpless before a force beyond his immediate comprehension. It is the ultimate, cynical conclusion of his philosophy of making people victims of environments and circumstances.

Hitchcock now started work on an old project, his film version of Winston Graham's novel, *Marnie*. Earlier, from the palace at Monte Carlo, Princess Grace had indicated that she would like to return to the screen for an Alfred Hitchcock film and he had suggested the title role of a girl who is a compulsive thief. Regrettably, the Monagasques did not take kindly to the idea of their ruler's consort becoming a film star again, and the proposal was abandoned.

'Tippi' Hedren as a compulsive thief



Marnie. With Hitchcock are Diane Baker, Sean Connery and a recumbent 'Tippi' Hedren

Now, in 1963, Hitchcock decided to cast 'Tippi' Hedren in the same part. She had been a leading fashion model and was 'discovered' by him in a breakfast-time television commercial he happened to see. *The Birds* was her first film. *Marnie* was more difficult. This was a young woman who, on the surface, was a cool, well-organised thief. Her technique was to gain employment in a position of confidence and then decamp with the contents of the office safe, reappearing hundreds of miles away with a new name and different coloured hair. But beneath she was a wretched neurotic, tortured by a hidden trauma from childhood involving her crippled mother in a Baltimore slum. Her last victim, a young publisher played by Sean Connery, catches her in the act of robbery and, attracted by the curious deficiency in Marnie's character, marries her. She is, it turns out, frigid, and shows more romantic interest in her beloved horse than in her husband. Patiently, he persists in uncovering the cause of Marnie's troubles —a guilt complex, as might be expected, arising from the fact that as a little girl she had killed a sailor, one of her mother's customers when she was a wartime prostitute.

Strange encounter at race-course

Marnie had a great deal more in it than was apparent on one viewing as the critic Ian Cameron demonstrated in *The Spectator*. There was the suggestion that the Connery character was just as mixed-up in his passionate obsession with imperfection in the shape of the mentally-ill Marnie. In the nightmare sequence and the husband's pseudo-psychiatrist bedside manner there is a hint of self-parody, the tables of *Spellbound* turned round. There is a strange *non sequitur* encounter at a race-track between Marnie and a man who half-remembers her in another guise. This incident generates a feeling of menace and disquiet but is not referred to again—it parallels Janet Leigh's fear at the appearance of the policeman in *Psycho*—an unsettling red herring, in fact.

The film's settings vary from slum to stately home, with a glimpse of American hunting folk 'old boy'ing each other. As in *Psycho* Hitchcock is entranced with the image of cars being driven through heavy rain. Some of the effects in *Marnie*, such as the reddening of the screen whenever the heroine chances on her least agreeable colour and the slow-motion death of the horse, are almost crude in comparison with usual Hitchcock. *Marnie* is, however, an absorbing if slightly disappointing film. It would be pleasant if its intrinsic merit were to emerge, as in the case of *Vertigo*, with the passage of time.

Sean Connery in **Marnie**

On the run. Julie Andrews and Paul Newman in **Torn Curtain**

Cuba si! Karin Dor and John Vernon in **Topaz**

Hitchcock at 70

Alfred Hitchcock's fiftieth film was *Torn Curtain*, released in 1966 and remarkable for the eccentric casting of Julie Andrews and Paul Newman as a western couple pursued through East Germany. A dull and curiously spiritless work, it is memorable only for one scene, in which a menacing communist agent is done to death in a remote farmhouse, his agonies gruesomely drawn out in order to show how hard it is to kill a man. *Topaz*, released after its director's 70th birthday, is also a spy film, based on Leon Uris' novel about a defecting Russian splitting open French security, with Frederick Stafford in the central role of a Gallic diplomat.

Hitchcock prefers to spend a long, sometimes agonising period on script preparation. 'My films are made on paper,' he says. For months he will work with his writers tying up every part of the film. Only when he has completely understood the motivation of each character will he start the actual business of filming. Long consultations with the art director will have ensured that he has achieved what he wants in the way of settings. He rehearses his actors in conference, making sure that they understand every nuance of their parts. He is patient to the point of tediousness. He is painstaking about detail. On the floor things tend to go smoothly. He never, if he can help it, looks through the viewfinder. He likes to use the same team on his pictures because they are used to what he wants. His cameraman, Robert Burks, has worked on a dozen films and the late George Tomasini was editor of nine. Bernard Herrman, composer of the music for *Marnie*, worked with Hitchcock on seven earlier pictures. Hitchcock often sketches the composition of a shot, rather in the manner of Eisenstein. His method of film-making is thorough and perfectionist; he is contemptuous of the slapdash procedure of certain other directors. A voracious reader, especially of crime books, he rarely goes to the cinema and prefers not to see films which have consciously attempted to imitate him. If anyone asks what he thought of the 1959 Rank remake of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* he will say: 'What remake? I know of only one.'

He lives with Mrs Hitchcock in, by Hollywood standards, a small house in Bel Air, with only a daily help. His wife ('Madam') does the cooking. They have an enormous walk-in refrigerator in which exotic, out-of-season foods are stored. He has a good art

collection: several Utrillos, two Klees, a Morland. At weekends the Hitchcocks drive 400 miles north to a small house not far from Bodega Bay, where *The Birds* was shot. On his annual visits to London he always stays in the same suite at Claridges. His dozen suits are all almost exactly the same in cut and cloth. Regularly he astonishes the clientele of the Palace Hotel, St Moritz, gaudily clad in their winter casuals, by appearing in their midst in his sombre navy-blue business suit.

Yet in spite of his conservative tastes there is an exhibitionist side to his character that comes out in his practical joking (he will say to a colleague as a lift nears the ground floor, 'I didn't think one shot could make such a mess, there was blood everywhere' and get out leaving confusion behind him). His whimsical introductions to his TV programmes have made him an easily recognised celebrity, as indeed have his personal appearances in his films. These are really superstition, he alleges, and in his later films he always gets them over as quickly as possible—in the case of *North by Northwest* and *The Birds* almost as the credits fade. His wife has said that he is the only man who can tell a dirty story without giving offence. He is amiable and patient with reporters and gratified if they show signs of having done their homework before interviewing him. He is ready to discuss the minutest detail about his films and has a fantastic memory. He never hesitates to reveal the secrets of a spectacular effect and dislikes the craft of film-making being turned into a mystique. He regards himself as an entertainer and sells his films as a showman. Yet he is delighted by the attentions of the *cinéastes* who have made a cult of Hitchcockism. He is particularly proud to have been described as the father of the *nouvelle vague* and flattered by the genuflections of the *Cahiers* critics, particularly the young French director François Truffaut, whose pilgrimage to California is crystallised in his long-awaited book on the Master.

Alfred Hitchcock's classless appeal to all levels of audience is a characteristic shared with Chaplin, Griffith and a handful of the greatest names in the history of the cinema.

The films of Alfred Hitchcock

Title writer and designer	**1921–2**	Call of Youth (Hugh Ford)
		The Great Day (Hugh Ford)
		The Princess of New York (Donald Crisp)
		Tell Your Children (Donald Crisp)
		Three Live Ghosts (George Fitzmaurice)
Directed (unfinished)	**1921**	Number Thirteen
Completed with Seymour Hicks when original director fell ill	**1922**	Always Tell Your Wife
Designer, assistant director, script collaborator	**1922**	Woman to Woman (Graham Cutts)
	1923	The White Shadow (Graham Cutts)
Designer, assistant director, scriptwriter	**1924**	The Passionate Adventure (Graham Cutts)
	1925	The Blackguard (Graham Cutts)
		The Prude's Fall (Graham Cutts)
Director	**1925**	The Pleasure Garden
	1926	The Mountain Eagle (U.S. Fear o' God)
		The Lodger
	1927	Downhill (U.S. When Boys Leave Home)
		Easy Virtue
		The Ring
	1928	The Farmer's Wife
		Champagne
	1929	The Manxman
		Blackmail
Contributed scenes	**1930**	Elstree Calling
Director		Juno and the Paycock
		Murder
	1931	The Skin Game
	1932	Rich and Strange (U.S. East of Shanghai)
		Number Seventeen
Produced		Lord Camber's Ladies (Benn W. Levy)

Director

1933	Waltzes from Vienna (U.S. Strauss' Great Waltz)
1934	The Man Who Knew Too Much
1935	The Thirty-Nine Steps
1936	The Secret Agent Sabotage (U.S. A Woman Alone)
1937	Young and Innocent (U.S. The Girl was Young)
1938	The Lady Vanishes
1939	Jamaica Inn
1940	Rebecca Foreign Correspondent
1941	Mr and Mrs Smith (R.K.O.) Suspicion (R.K.O.)
1942	Saboteur (Universal)
1943	Shadow of a Doubt (Universal)
1944	Lifeboat (Twentieth Century Fox) Bon Voyage (Min. of Information) Aventure Malgache (M.O.I.)
1945	Spellbound (Selznick)
1946	Notorious (R.K.O.)
1947	The Paradine Case (Selznick)
1948	Rope (Warner)
1949	Under Capricorn (Warner)
1950	Stage Fright (Warner)
1951	Strangers on a Train (Warner)
1953	I Confess (Warner)
1954	Dial M for Murder (Warner) Rear Window (Paramount)
1955	To Catch a Thief (Paramount)
1956	The Trouble with Harry (Paramount) The Man Who Knew Too Much (Para.)
1957	The Wrong Man (Warner)
1958	Vertigo (Paramount)
1959	North by Northwest (M.G.M.)
1960	Psycho (Paramount)
1963	The Birds (Universal)
1964	Marnie (Universal)
1966	Torn Curtain (Universal)
1969	Topaz (Universal)

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